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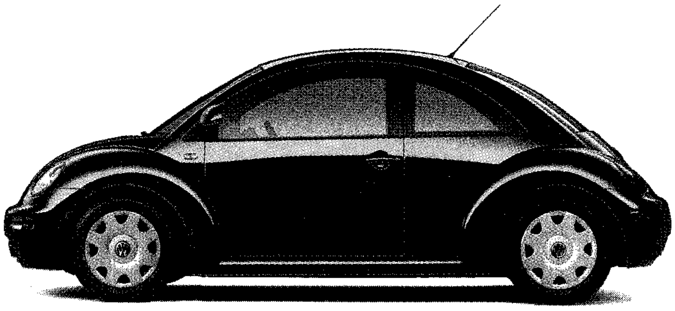

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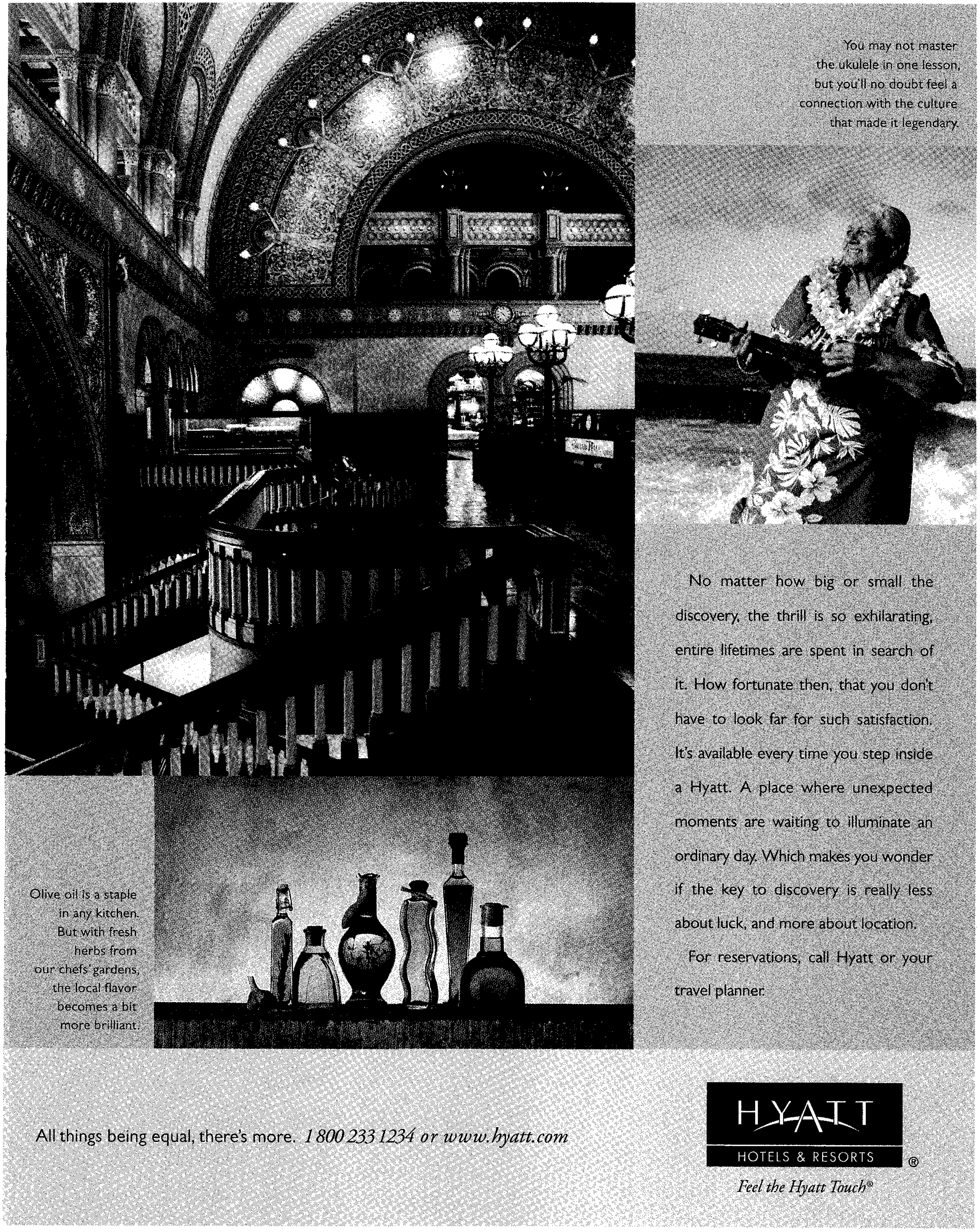
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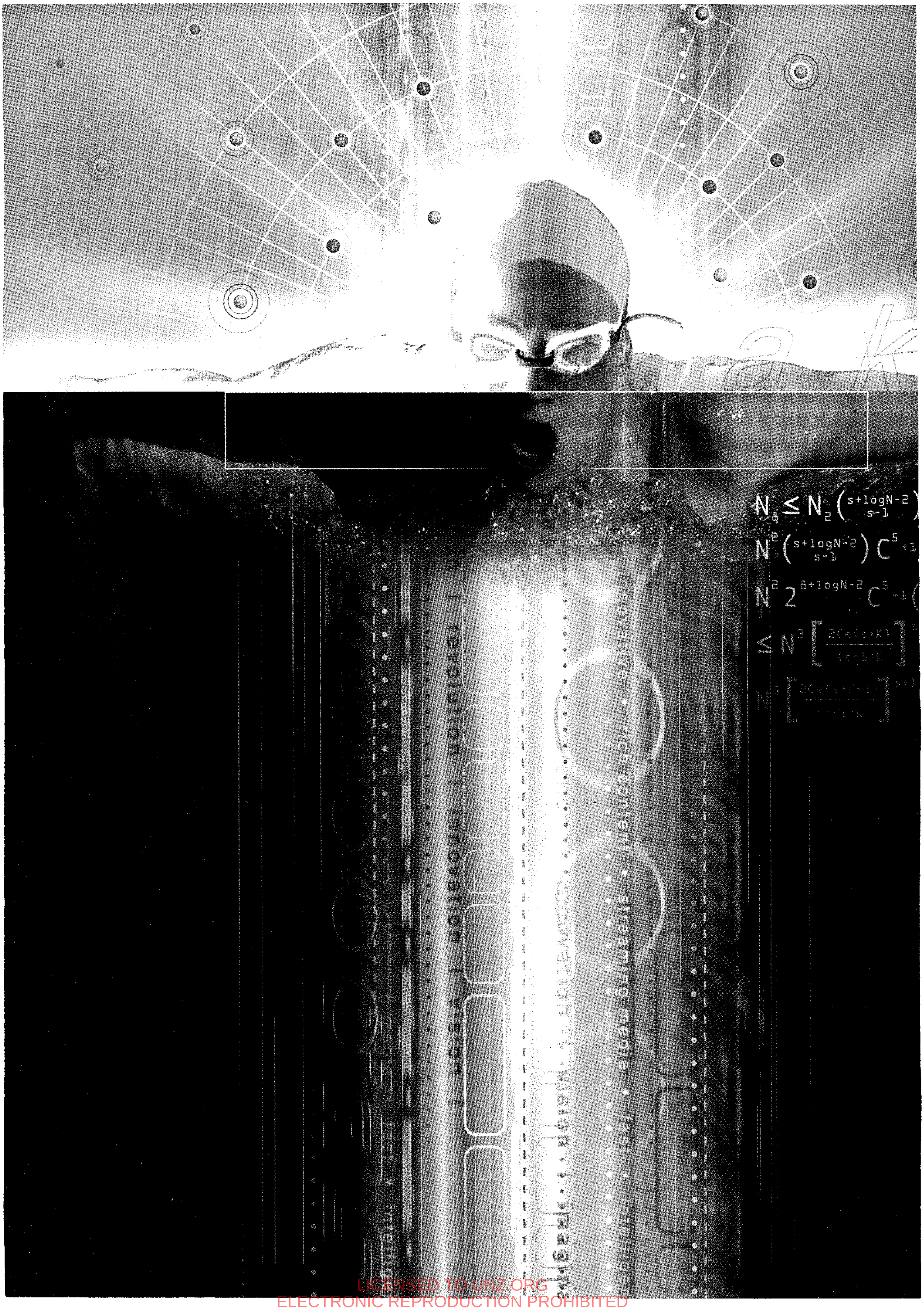
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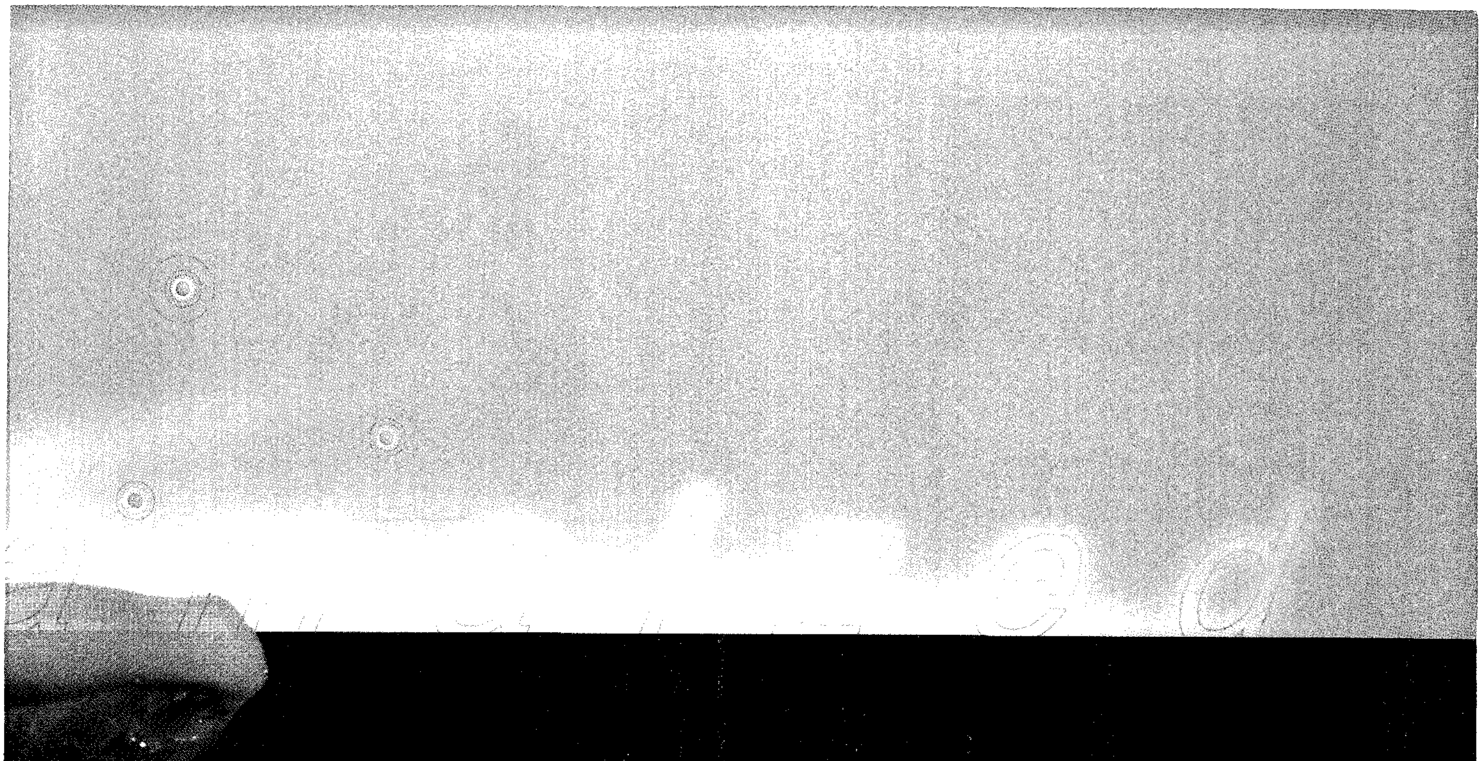

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THE DIGITAL AGE

DECEMBER 6, 1999

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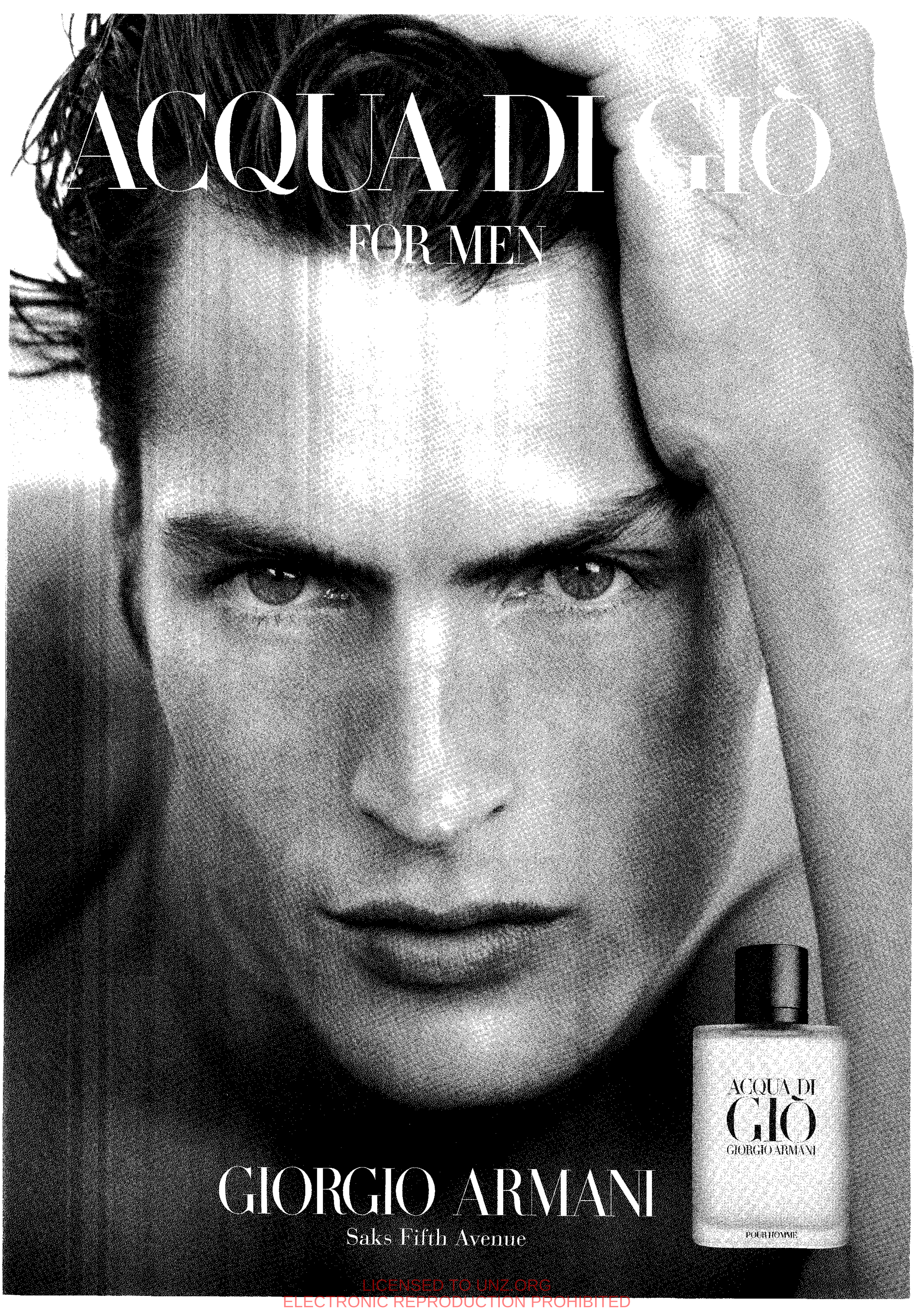
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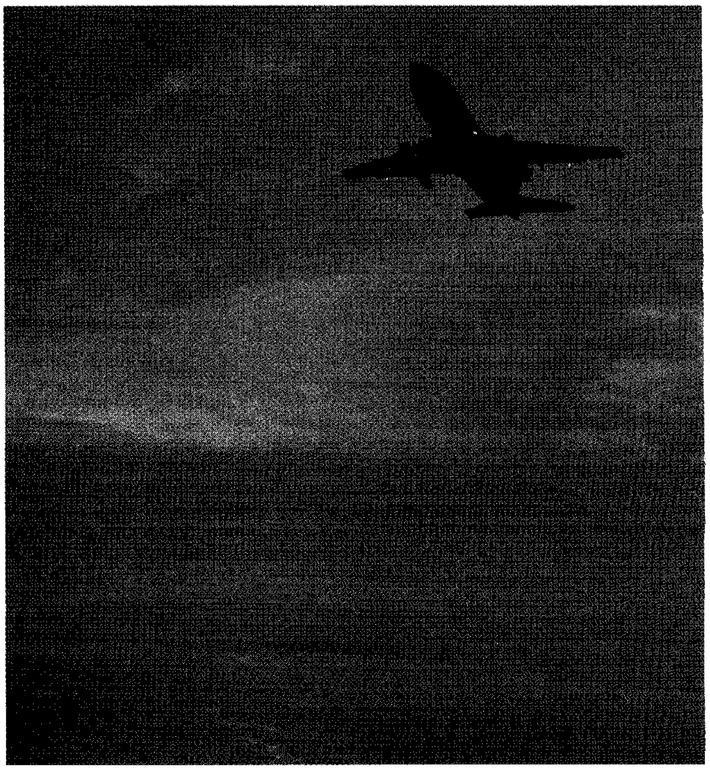

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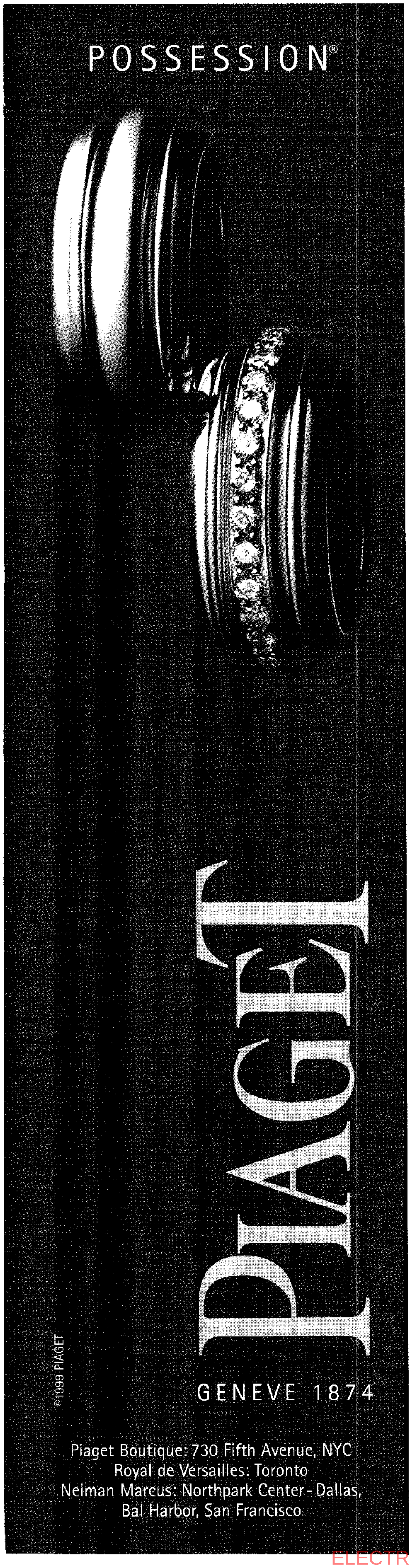

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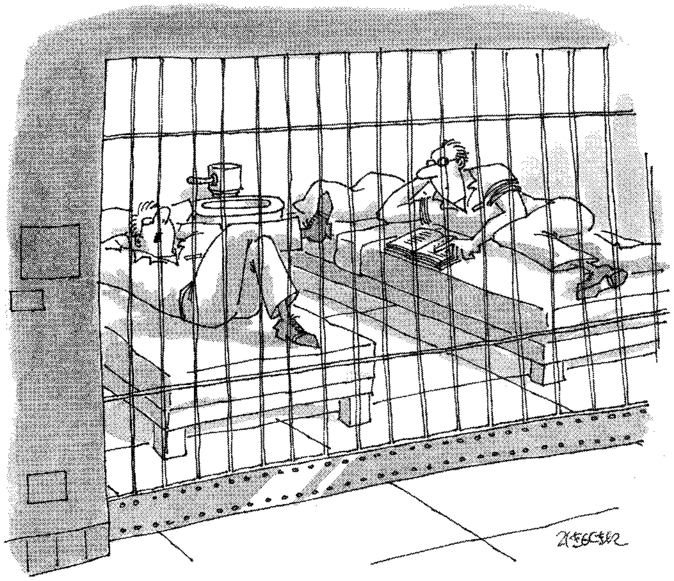

"It's the millennium, so maybe we should plan something special for New Year's Eve."

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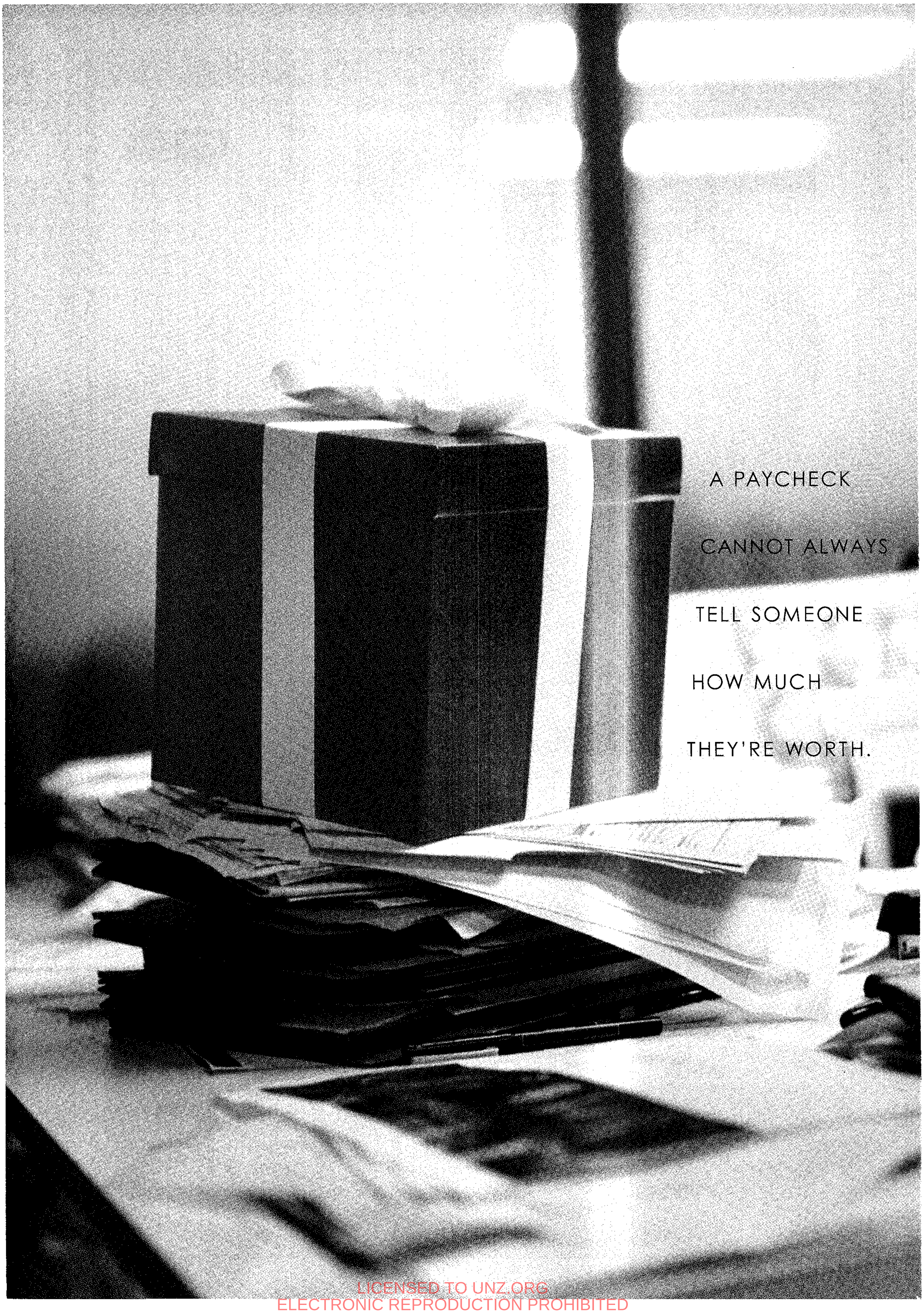
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IN DEFENSE OF FORGERY

Douglas Preston's article "Woody's Dream" (Our Far-Flung Correspondents, November 15th) noted that when Forrest Fenn, a collector of early American artifacts, discovered that his Clovis stone points were actually forgeries, created by Woody Blackwell, he began to treat the points carelessly ("no more caresses and black velvet"). Yet the piece was redolent of collectors' and experts' awe of the unsurpassed craftsmen (or women) of Clovis, Folsom, and other prehistoric cultures. And it emphasized that Blackwell is the only living person capable of such exquisite work. Why is he not retained and supported by archeological institutes and museums to provide insights into the minds and work of ancient American artists? To Forrest Fenn and the other experts and collectors, I say, "Sitting around a campfire with Woody Blackwell is as close as you're ever going to come to meeting a Clovis artist. What would you pay for that opportunity?"

Mark Van Stone
Austin, Tex.

The real criminals in Douglas Preston's article, of course, are not the forgers, but the collectors. When an artifact becomes simply a trophy, divorced from its archeological context, the chance for understanding our shared human past is reduced.

Leslie Birdwell
Huntington, W.Va.

SCIENCE STRIKES BACK

John Banville, in "Recipe for a Witch-Hunt" (Books, November 1st), may be right that "belief in witchcraft and magic will never completely die." But at least one can now see progress toward the goal of a rational civilization, based on science, that rejects the idea of a supernatural world. That progress has been slow, since it is opposed by religion, but there is little doubt that, over the centuries, people have increasingly come to accept science as the only reliable guide to understanding the world. Events that once seemed to demand a supernatural explanation are now more often seen for what they are: problems that science has yet to solve.

Norman Horowitz
Pasadena, Calif.

A HELLUVA TOWN

Nancy Franklin's claims, in her review of Ric Burns's "New York: A Documentary Film" (On Television, November 15th), that "the idea that the city is dedicated to anything, that it has intention of any kind, is ridiculous" and that the city is "the capital of indifference" are a disservice to the memory of the many philanthropists and countless civic-minded people whose efforts helped build the metropolis. Yes, New York is a magnificent showcase of entrepreneurial achievement. But its equally great water, sewer, and transit systems, its schools, libraries, and museums, its hospitals and charitable institutions, and its parks and parkways were intended to benefit its citizens and visitors. They are, indeed, a stunning example of municipal purpose.

Luther S. Harris
New York City

A MILLENNIAL RIVALRY

Yankee fans were outdone by the Mets folks this October ("Home Cooking," by Roger Angell, November 22nd)? This about a group who, during the Boston series, waved a sign saying "The Curse of the Bambino is Y2K Compliant"? I don't think so.

Tim Zagin
New York City

Don't Forget to Vote: The ballot for the first annual *New Yorker* Book Awards can be found on page 166.

•

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LAURENT CILLUFFO

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE HOLIDAYS

"The Radio City Christmas Spectacular"—Long legs, live animals, and Santa, set to music. (Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Through Jan. 5.)

"A Christmas Carol"—Tony Roberts is Scrooge and Reginald VelJohnson is the Ghost of Christmas Present in a musical version of Dickens's tale. Alan Menken wrote the score. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 465-6741. Through Dec. 30.) . . . ¶ On Dec. 5 at 2, Gregg Whiteside, the voice of WQXR, reads from Dickens's original manuscript, at the Morgan Library, where it is on display through Jan. 9. (29 E. 36th St. For tickets, call 685-0008, ext. 347.)

Winter Solstice—Grateful Dead percussionist Mickey Hart joins Paul Winter, his consort, vocalist Arto Tuncboyaciyan, and a host of other musicians and dancers for the twentieth anniversary of Winter's annual celebration of the moment when the days start lengthening again. (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 662-2133. Dec. 9-10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11 at 2 and 7:30.)

Nutcrackers—In addition to the New York City Ballet performances (through Jan. 2; see Dance listings), several other plummy versions are available. Faculty and student musicians and dancers from the Brooklyn Music School trim Tchaikovsky's program to one hour and move it closer to home for "A Brooklyn Nutcracker." (Brooklyn Music School Playhouse, 126 Felix St. 718-638-5660. Dec. 10 at 8 and Dec. 11 at 4.) . . . ¶ "The Yorkville Nutcracker," choreographed by Francis Patrelle, transposes the action from Germany to New York. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Dec. 9-10 at 7:30, Dec. 11 at 2 and 7:30, and Dec. 12 at 2.) . . . ¶ An hour-long child-friendly version by the New York Theatre Ballet goes *en pointe* at Florence Gould Hall. (55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Dec. 17 and Dec. 27 at 1, 3:30, and 6:30 and Dec. 18-19 and Dec. 26 at 11:30, 1, and 3:30.)

All Aboard!—Large-gauge model steam engines and trains chug around a thirty-foot balsam at the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, passing waterfalls, wooded glens, and models of historic New York City buildings, including Grand Central Terminal, Gracie Mansion, and Edgar Allan Poe's Bronx cottage. On Dec. 5 at 4:30, there's a musical lighting ceremony for the tree. Weekends, from Dec. 11 to Jan. 9, puppeteer Ralph Lee presents a dramatic version of the children's story "The Little Engine That Could." (New York Botanical Garden, Bronx Park. For more information about the puppet-show schedule, call 718-817-8700.)

Trees—Some thirty thousand bulbs light up a hundred-foot Norway spruce at Rockefeller Center. "Today"-show stars Matt Lauer and Al Roker will be on hand for the lighting ceremony on Dec. 1 at 7, along with singers Enrique Iglesias, Britney Spears, and 'N Sync. The tree, which is the center's tallest ever, will remain aglow through Jan. 3. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St.) . . . ¶ Jazz vocalists Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross ease in the holiday season at the lighting of Lincoln Center's forty-foot Colorado spruce. Also on hand are actor Ernest Borgnine, bass Samuel Ramey, and Big Bird and other "Sesame Street" characters. (Josie Robertson Plaza, Broadway at 63rd St. Dec. 3 at 7.) . . . ¶ Eighteenth-century Neapolitan angels and crèche figures grace the boughs and ring the trunk of the Metropolitan Museum's twenty-foot artificial blue spruce. There is a lighting ceremony every Friday and Saturday at 7. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. Through Jan. 9.) . . . ¶ How do you make a twenty-five-foot tree stand out amid the towering skyscrapers and ribbons of neon in Times Square? Invite Sandy Duncan and other Broadway and Off Broadway stars to entertain at the lighting ceremony. (Broadway at 46th St. Dec. 8 at 5:15.) . . . ¶ Origami beetles, meteorites, and swans adorn the branches of the fourteen-foot artificial evergreen at the American Museum of Natural History. (Central Park W. at 79th St.)

Playtime—The New-York Historical Society throws a holiday party, with craft making, carolling, and a reading by actress Cynthia Harris of Clement Clarke Moore's poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas." (2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400. Dec. 5 at noon.) . . . ¶ The Museum of the City of New York offers children a chance to decorate cookies, make candy necklaces, and pepper St. Nick with questions. (Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 534-1672. Dec. 7 at 2.)

Northern Lights—The Bronx Zoo stays open after dark, throwing the switch on a hundred and forty-four lighted sculptures—some up to twenty feet tall—of tigers, birds, elephants, and other animals. They have live reindeer and camels up there, too. (Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx. 718-367-1010. Through Jan. 2.)

Naughty and Nice—While children sleep, dreaming of sugarplums (or, more likely, a new Playstation), the city offers a few choice treats for those with later bedtimes. Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman break out the lipstick and eyeliner for their down-at-the-heels cabaret show "Kiki and Herb: Do They Know It's Christmas?" (Fez, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680. Through Dec. 29.) . . . ¶ Actress Lea DeLaria lays on the holiday cheer with her comic variety show "Who You Callin' Ho, Ho, Ho: A Very Lea Christmas." (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Dec. 3-5, Dec. 10-12, and Dec. 17-19.) . . . ¶ Ricky Martin, Jennifer Lopez, Smashmouth, and other pop acts of the moment share the stage at the Z100 Jingle Ball '99. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Dec. 16 at 7.)

Hanukkah—Starting on Dec. 3, at 3:30, the first flame will grace the thirty-two-foot menorah at Fifth Ave. and 59th St. New lights will be added over the next seven evenings at 5:30 (except on the final night, Dec. 10, when the lighting takes place at 3:30). There'll be music, dancing, and hot potato pancakes on Dec. 4, starting at 8. For more information, call 718-778-6000.)

Kwanzaa—Dancers and musicians perform at a traditional African marketplace in the halls of the American Museum of Natural History. (Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5100. Dec. 26, starting at noon.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

"Messiah"—Come December, Handel's renowned oratorio never goes begging for exposure. Recommendations for top-drawer, complete interpretations include those by the St. Thomas Choir and the period-instrument Concert Royal (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St.; 664-9360; Dec. 14 and Dec. 16 at 7:30) and by Musica Sacra (Avery Fisher Hall; 875-5030; Dec. 15 and Dec. 20 at 8). . . . ¶ For revisionists, Concordia Orchestra's blow-the-roof-off pop-and-gospel version, called "Too Hot to Handel," returns with vocal powerhouses Lillias White and Vivian Cherry, under the baton of Marin Alsop. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Dec. 21 at 8.) . . . ¶ Millennial Arts Productions offers the "Messiah" staged as an opera, set in the Bedlam asylum, with the soloists' arias sung as cathartic outgrowths of a therapy session. (John Jay Theatre, 899 Tenth Ave., at 59th St. Dec. 9-11 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 5. For information, call 307-4100.)

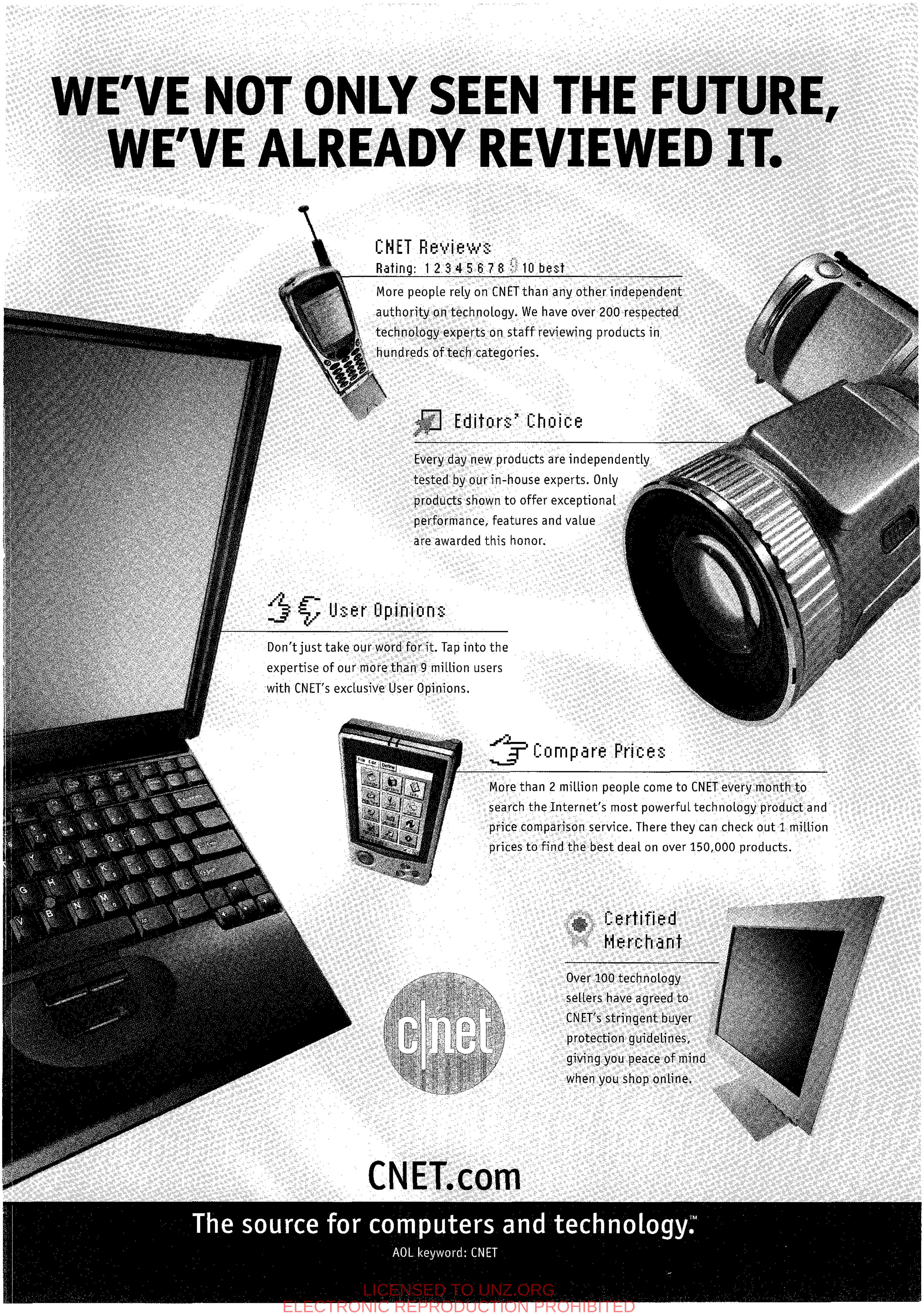
Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir—The six cantatas of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio" add up to a long evening, so conductor Ton Koopman has decided to limit his presentation to the first four. With a solo lineup that includes countertenor Andreas Scholl and tenor Christoph Prégardien, this concert should be on every music lover's wish list. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Dec. 19 at 7.)

Sharing the Spirit—Actors Betty Buckley, Julie Harris, Cherry Jones, and Victor Garber join two of the choirs from St. Bartholomew's in the church's Byzantine expanses for a candlelit evening of readings, carols, and seasonal choral classics, as an AIDS benefit. (Park Ave. at 50th St. 378-0248. Dec. 13-14 at 7:30.)

Music Before 1800—New York City's longtime producer of early music offers two seasonal programs: on Dec. 19, a recital of medieval Christmas music performed by Lionheart, an American men's vocal ensemble on the rise, and, on Jan. 9, a concert of English and American choral and organ works, ancient and modern, inspired by Christmas and New Year's. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. Afternoons at 4.)

Gabrieli Consort and Players—This leading English ensemble, directed by Paul McCreesh, promises a splendiferous evening of German Baroque pieces—some for multiple choirs of voices and instruments—that includes Michael Praetorius's "Mass for Christmas Morning." (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. Dec. 16 at 8. For information about tickets, call 800-627-0655.)

Classical New Year's Eve—For classical-music aficionados, options include the Metropolitan Opera's presentation of a single operatic act—Act II of "Die Fledermaus," the party scene, with interpolated cameo appearances by whichever opera singers happen to be within limo distance (362-6000; Dec. 31 at 7), and the New York Philharmonic's uplifting program of Bach and Beethoven, including the latter's Ninth Symphony, the ultimate ode to universal brotherhood (Avery Fisher Hall; 875-5030; Dec. 31 at 7:30).



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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Adam Baum and the Jew Movie—Ron Liebman stars as a Jewish movie mogul, who hires a Gentile (Christopher Evan Welch) to write a film about anti-Semitism, in a comedy by Daniel Goldfarb. Previews begin Dec. 3. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

Enter the Night—The Signature Theatre Company's Maria Irene Fornes season continues with a 1993 drama. In previews through Dec. 4. Opens Dec. 5 at 6:45. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

Hamlet—Liev Schreiber portrays the prince, in a Public Theatre staging directed by Andrei Serban. In previews. (425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Henry Rollins—The writer, musician, and actor, in his latest spoken-word rant, "Smile You're Travelling." Six performances only, beginning Dec. 7 at 7:30. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

Hurricane—Classic Stage Company and Naked Angels have teamed up to stage Erin Cressida Wilson's comedy of manners. Previews begin Dec. 3. (CSC, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10.)

If Memory Serves—Elizabeth Ashley is a fading television actress whose son (Sam Trammell) causes a scandal by making his recollections of his childhood public, in a comedy by Jonathan Tolins. Directed by Leonard Foglia. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Jolson & Co.—The York Theatre Company kicks off the season with a musical about the life of Al Jolson. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

Marie Christine—Michael John LaChiusa's new musical, set in New Orleans in the eighteen-hundreds, starring Audra McDonald. Graciela Daniele is the director. Two previews on Dec. 1. Opens Dec. 2 at 6:45. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Minnelli on Minnelli—Liza sings songs made famous through the movie musicals her father, Vincente, directed. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100.)

Refuge—Neil Pepe directs a play by Jessica Goldberg, in which a woman is left to care for her feeble brother and troubled sister when her parents move to Florida. Opens Dec. 1 at 8. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 315-2120.)

Space—A scientist encounters three people with similar stories about contact with otherworldly beings, in a drama by Tina Landau. In previews through the Dec. 5 matinée. Opens that night at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Swing!—A musical salute to the genre, starring the jazz vocalist Ann Hampton Callaway. Directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Trudy Blue—In the latest play from Marsha Norman ("'night, Mother"), Polly Draper stars as a successful Manhattan novelist in a moment of crisis. Preview on Dec. 1. Opens Dec. 2 at 8. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765.)

True History and Real Adventures—Michael Mayer directs a musical play by Sybille Pearson, about a Scottish girl who comes to America at the turn of the century in search of Calamity Jane. In previews. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366.)

Waiting in the Wings—Two elderly actresses and rivals (Lauren Bacall and Rosemary Harris) find themselves in the same retirement home, in Noël Coward's 1960 play. Directed by Michael Langham. Previews begin Dec. 3. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Y2K—James Naughton and Patricia Kalember portray an affluent New York couple whose lives are turned upside down by a computer hacker, in a drama by Arthur

Kopit. In previews through Dec. 5. Opens Dec. 7 at 8. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200).

OPENED RECENTLY

Adobe Theatre Company—The troupe's new show, which has an unprintably saucy title, is "part satire and part low comedy (way low!)" and allegedly follows in the footprints of Lassie, Rin Tin Tin, and Benji. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

Ancestral Voices—A staged reading, with a rotating cast, of A. R. Gurney's play. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Contact—The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, co-conceived with John Weidman, is a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection, the atmosphere of longing. It's a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser—startling and fresh and free from the infernal pretentiousness of Broadway. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/18-25/99.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Contact with the Enemy—In Frank D. Gilroy's drama, two Second World War veterans are accidentally reunited at the United States Holocaust Museum. (Ensemble Studio Theatre, 549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

The Country Club—Douglas Carter Beane's satire on the young suburban set is loaded with witty dialogue, and the production is graced by the Drama Dept.'s always good acting and a fine set, but Beane's writing suffers from a peculiar shallowness almost worthy of his characters. They satirize themselves, too, but it all has the effect of a valentine rather than a biting sendup. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441. Closes Dec. 18.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. She's also a bit like Tinkerbell, real if the audience believes in her, and it's a testament to the power of the character and of Humphries's performance that she compels instant belief. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Dinner with Friends—Donald Margulies's new play concerns two upper-middle-class couples who have been married for a dozen or so years; one of them survives the wear and tear of marriage, and the other doesn't. It's an intelligent depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage—Margulies avoids making his characters' situations schematic or inevitable—and the cast give well-rounded performances. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Eclipsed—Patricia Burke Brogan's drama, set in Ireland, follows the lives of four unwed mothers forced to labor as penitents in a convent laundry. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

1839—Gale Gates et al.'s new production is a multimedia meditation on the mind of Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the inventor of the daguerreotype. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-522-4597.)

Epic Proportions—A spoof of the making of a Biblical movie on location in the Arizona desert during the early thirties; it dramatizes many plagues, but no plague greater than the one that corporate culture has visited on Broadway in the last few years. What's strange in a piece that has no ear for the moment is that it contains the pitch-perfect performance of Kristin Chenoweth, a comedienne of terrific originality and charm. (10/18-25/99) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Exact Center of the Universe—An amiable comedy, lightly seasoned with insight, about a classic Southern dragon-lady mother. Joan Vail Thorne's script has some sharply written jokes, John Tillinger's direction is flawless, and Frances Sternhagen, as the mother, gives a beautiful performance. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

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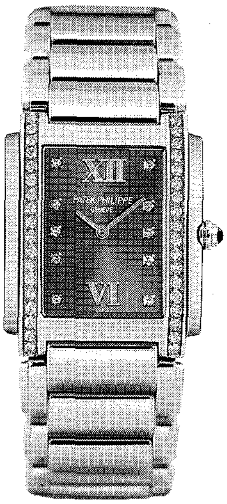

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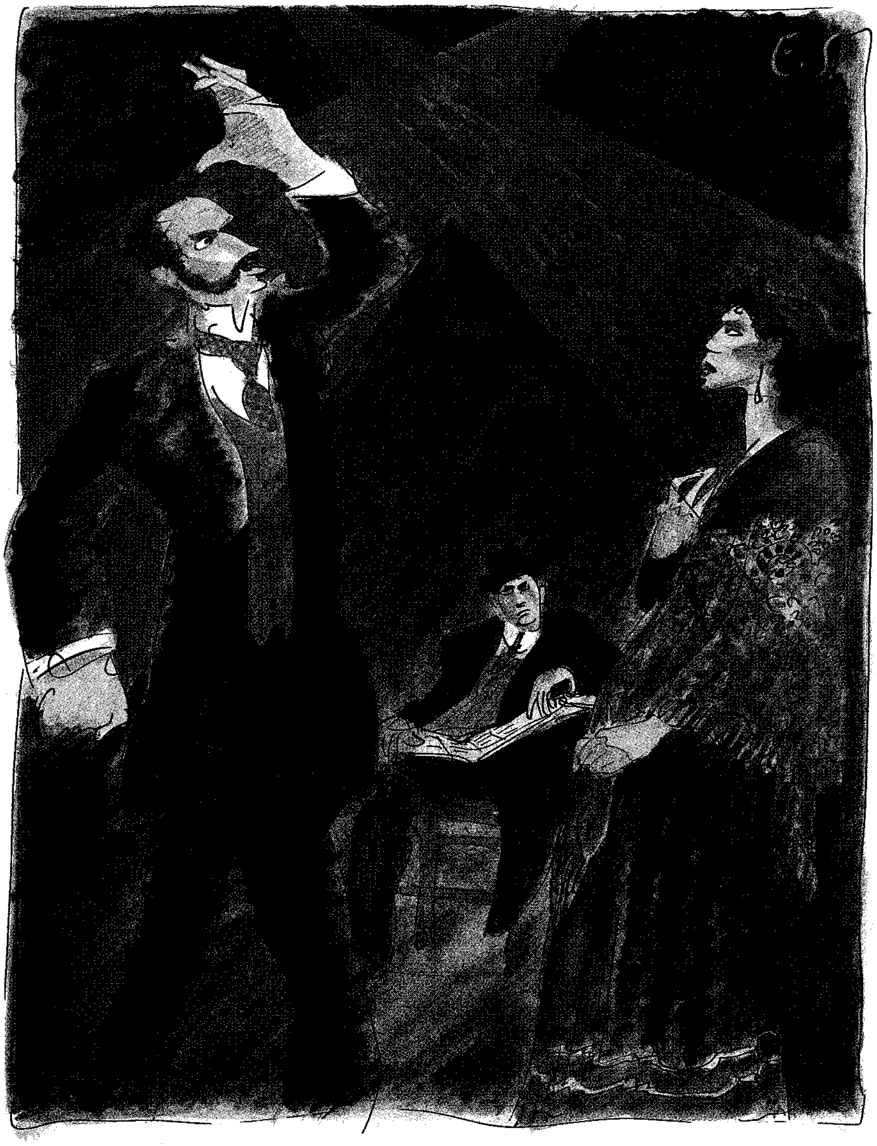

"Marie Christine," a musical by Michael John LaChiusa, at the Vivian Beaumont.

EDWARD SOREL

An Experiment with an Air Pump—The odd title of Shelagh Stevenson's play describes a study carried out by its eighteenth-century characters; their attempt to determine how much oxygen deprivation animals can endure neatly encapsulates the play's themes—the relationships between science and morality, scientific passion and love, knowledge and society's stability—which are explored with humor and intelligence. Set both at the end of the eighteenth century and on our own upcoming millennial New Year's Eve, the play smoothly plumbs its engaging characters' fears of the future while puncturing our pompous notion that this New Year is different from all others. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 313 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Dec. 12.)

Fuddy Meers—The very promising playwright David Lindsay-Abaire's kitchen-sink comedy goes so over the top that you might miss the melancholy beneath the absurd chaos. In a cast of characters (played by the best comic ensemble in years) which includes a blissful amnesiac, a maimed criminal with a speech impediment, a protective mother whose stroke has rendered her Caryl Churchill cryptic, and a sweet kook who expresses his anger with a hand puppet, no one is who they seem and everyone is connected in surprising ways, and through surprising needs—the *Über*-dysfunctional family? The point seems to be that in this upside-down world, saying what you need to say is not only difficult but also a privilege, and memory is as much a burden as a blessing. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Ghosts—Ibsen's 1881 drama. (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 279-4200.)

Give Me Your Answer, Do!—In Brian Friel's latest drama, two Irish friends and novelists, one a commercial failure, the other a best-seller, come together with their wives (and some in-laws and a literary archivist) for a late-summer afternoon of cocktails and angst. The whole thing builds to a vaguely "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" fervor in the second act, but the performances are exhilarating, so you forgive the unnecessarily melodramatic ending. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

In the Blood—Suzan-Lori Parks's new play is based on "The Scarlet Letter." Directed by David Esbjornson. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

The Jazz Singer—The Jewish Repertory Theatre presents a new musical version of the Samson Raphaelson play. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

John Gabriel Borkman—Ibsen's late drama, in a staging by the Pearl Theatre Company. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

Kat and the Kings—A rock-and-roll musical set in Cape Town in 1957. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Keep Bangin'—"Stomp" showed that you can cook up an evening of theatre out of percussion alone, but this show proves it better. It's an unslick production—the point is the drumming alone. The ten-man cast is led by Jared Crawford, who, with his million-toothed smile, firestorm of dreads, and rare genius, lifts the whole thing into a kind of art heaven. (Players Theatre, 115 MacDougal St. 254-5076.)

Kiss Me, Kate—Brian Stokes Mitchell and Marin Mazzie star in a revival of the Cole Porter musical, under the direction of Michael Blakemore. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Maybe Baby, It's You—Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing that makes the evening more than a series of skits—it's what you instinctively know at thirty but wish you'd learned at twenty. Directed with a sure, light touch by Jeremy Dobrish. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

Morning, Noon and Night—A day in the life of the eccentric, obsessive monologuist Spalding Gray, removed from his natural habitat (New York City) and transplanted to an old house in Sag Harbor, where he lives in anxiety-tinged bliss with his girlfriend, stepdaughter, and two young sons. A haze of happiness hangs over the whole thing, which makes it seem a bit toothless, but Gray tells a good coming-of-age story, and his self-mocking exaggerations are actually endearing when turned on the domestic universe. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Passion of Frida Kahlo—Priscilla López portrays the Mexican painter, in a renamed restaging of Doris Sendler's drama "Goodbye My Friduchita." (Arclight Theatre, 152 W. 71st St. 307-4100.)

The Price—In Arthur Miller's 1968 play, a failed, dutiful brother, who thinks that life has given him a bad deal, cuts another bad deal, this time with a furniture dealer. But when his successful sibling turns up, the play becomes a negotiation about their family history, an agreement that can't be reached. As the rivalry is played out, the audience watches the riveting spectacle of a man clinging to a self-destructive illusion, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a metaphor for our culture of complaint, it ain't bad. And neither are the performances. "The Price" is not a waste of time, which is saying a lot on Broadway these days. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Putting It Together—A revue celebrating the songs of Stephen Sondheim, starring Carol Burnett. Directed by Eric D. Schaeffer. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Rainmaker—Jayne Atkinson and Woody Harrelson star in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Richard Nash's 1954 drama. Scott Ellis is the director. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

Saturday Night Fever—The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Shyster—Fisher Stevens, Annabella Sciorra, and Phyllis Newman are in the cast of a comedy by Bryan Goluboff, staged by Naked Angels. (Blue Heron, 123 E. 24th St. 279-4200.)

Tango Argentino—The dance revue, in a limited-engagement encore staging. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Uncle Jack—The director and writer Jeff Cohen's contemporary adaptation of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya." He manages, unlike some adaptors, to make an ever-fresh play seem newly accessible without raising the question "Why bother?" It's set on the expansive estate of a rural West Virginia family, and with the regrettable exception of Bernard K. Addison's scenery-chewing performance as the doctor, it's a sweet and rewarding experience. A charmer. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 604-4195.)

The Vagina Monologues—Eve Ensler's one-woman show, which she first performed in New York three years ago Off-Off Broadway, is based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about

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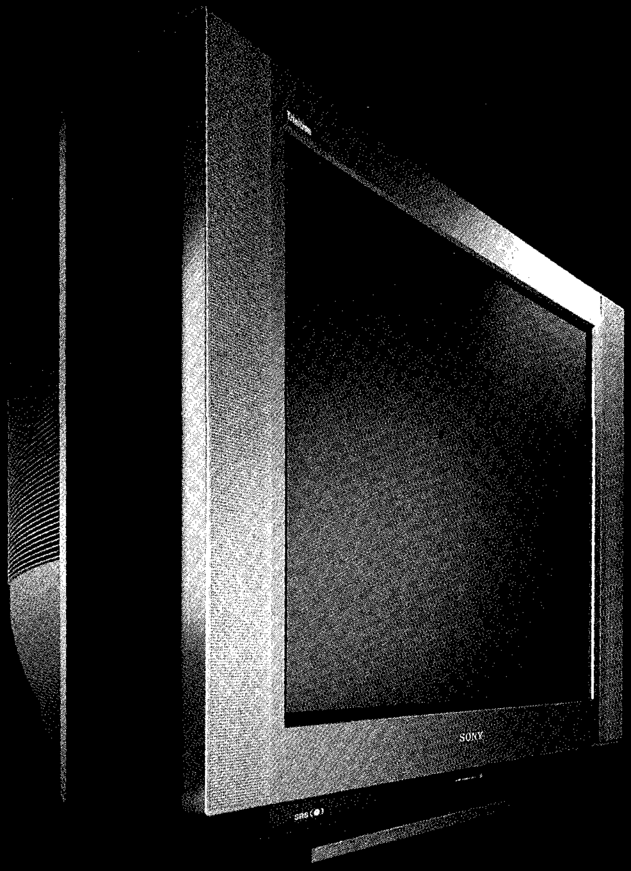

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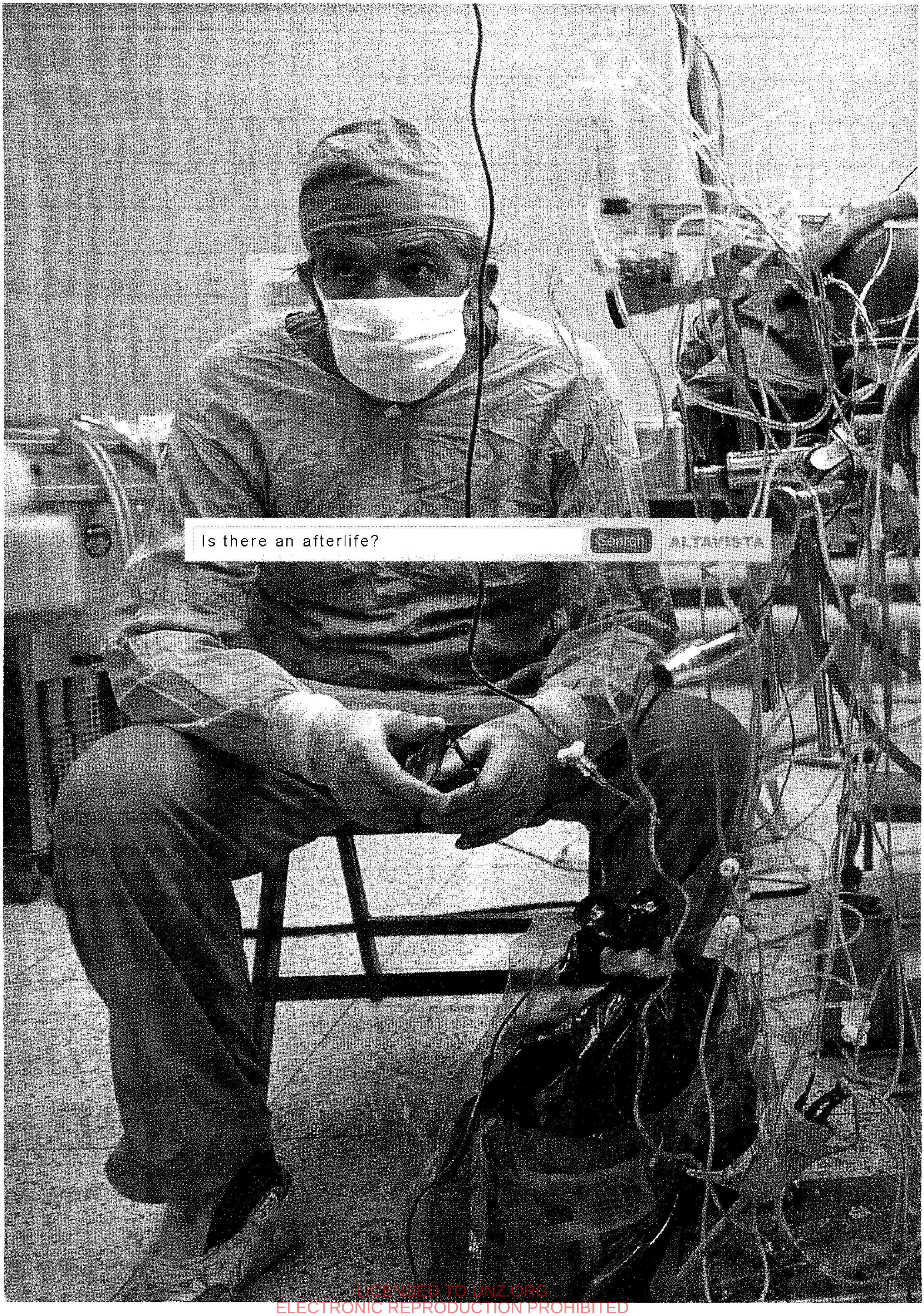
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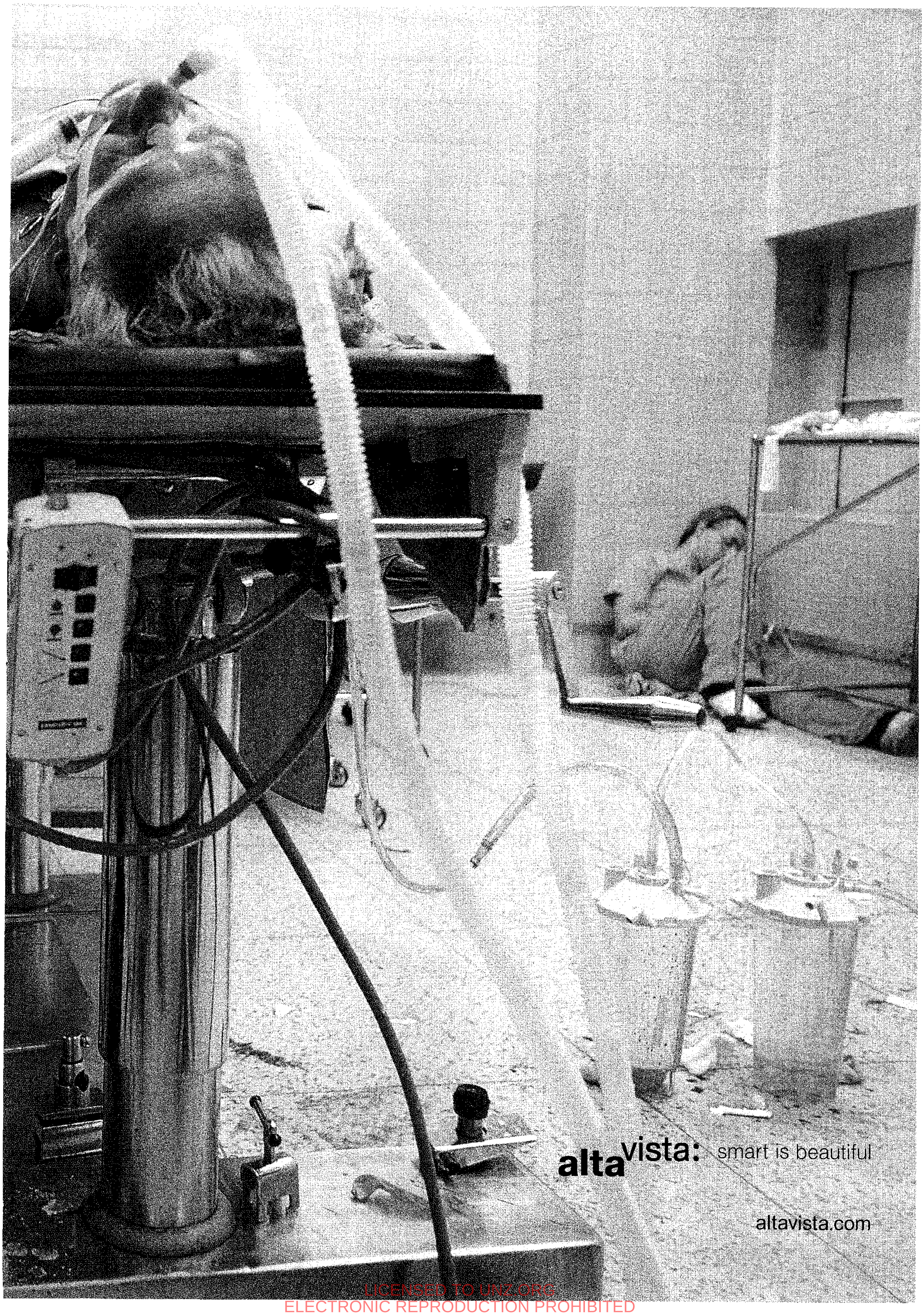
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their vaginas: the body part itself, the word, and why "it never sounds like a word you want to say" no matter how many times you say it. There's a certain amount of shtick involved—Ensler asked women what their vaginas would wear if they got dressed, and she offers up a litany of nicknames for "down there"—but most of the stories she tells are touching and memorable. Often sadly so: Ensler makes you realize that when it comes to treating women and their bodies with real respect, the world still has miles to go. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T SAY PAST MIDNIGHT:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

Bill (Crutch) Shannon in "The Art of Weightlessness," at P.S. 122.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—With its annual "Nutcracker" enchantment, the company returns to the business of inspiring little girls in pigtails to dream of a life *en pointe.* (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Nov. 30-Dec. 2 and Dec. 7 at 6, Dec. 3 at 8, Dec. 4 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 5 at 1 and 5.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE—Dec. 1 at 7: "Grace" and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 2 at 8, Dec. 4 at 2, and Dec. 5 at 7:30: "Night Creature," "Pas de Duke," "River," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 3 at 8 and Dec. 5 at 3: "Streams," "Ascension," "C-Sharp Street, B-Flat Avenue," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 4 at 8: "Streams," "Cry," "Grace," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 7 at 8: "Divining," "Echo: Far from Home," and "Hymn." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Jan. 2.)

BALLET HISPANICO—The Upper West Side Company, under the direction of Tina Ramirez, continues its mixture of adventurous new work (this season features premières from David Roussève, Pedro Ruiz, and Regina Miranda) and strong repertory pieces culled from earlier commissions. Perhaps the best example of the latter, "Good Night Paradise," by the Catalan choreographer Ramon Oller, is driven by a simple but powerful effect: upstage footlights play over the three couples, so the dancers become footnotes to their own giant shadows whirling on the bare Joyce wall. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Nov. 30-Dec. 3 and Dec. 7 at 8, Dec. 4 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 5 at 2 and 7:30. Through Dec. 12.)

"THE ART OF WEIGHTLESSNESS"—Bill (Crutch) Shannon presents his first evening-length program. Shannon's lifelong negotiations with an on-again, off-again disability—he was severely handicapped as a child, recovered enough during adolescence to grow deft in break-dancing and skateboarding, then suffered a relapse in his twenties which limited the ability of his joints to support his body weight—inspired him to create a slinky style of movement on crutches. He appears to float inches off the ground, his arms maneuvering the crutches the way a freestyle kayaker negotiates a stream. When he stops, he collapses artfully and to the beat, twirling around his crutches like a hip-hop jellyfish, with an invertebrate fluidity that invariably astounds the audience. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Dec. 2-5 at 8:30.)

"ROMANCE"—The Butoh soloist Min Tanaka. (P.S. 122. Dec. 3-4 at 11.)

"I MUTANTES SERAS"—The Brazilian choreographic duo of Roseanne Chamecki and Andrea Lerner offer a work about metamorphosis, in which, among other effects, the longtime dance partners at times appear to be parts of the same body. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Dec. 2-5 at 8. Through Dec. 12.)

IMPROVISATION FESTIVAL/NY—Four slates of improvisers on four nights (another follows Dec. 11). Nov. 30 at 8:30: Roxanne Butterfly, Ray Chung and Katarina Erikson, and Sondra Loring and Francisco Rider Pereira da Silva. . . . ¶ Dec. 2 at 8:30: Wendell Beavers and Mark Haim, Daniel Lepkoff, the Playing Field, and Shelly Senter and guests. . . . ¶ Dec. 3 at 8:30: Materia Prima, Eva Karczag, and Fred Darsow and dancers. . . . ¶ Dec. 5 at 8:30: Andrew de L. Harwood, the KJ Holmes Group, and Katie Duck and Martin Sonderkamp. (Danspace Project, St. Marks In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194.)

"THE REMEMBER PROJECT"—Twelve hours of performances from more than ninety performers and ensembles, with proceeds benefitting Dancers Responding to AIDS. (Danspace Project. For more information, call 840-0770. Dec. 4, noon to midnight.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

DIAMANDA GALÁS—For those who don't belong to the cult of Galás, her bilingual ululations suggest a woman alternately possessed by the spirits of Tina Turner, Yoko Ono, and an S & M dominatrix. For these concerts, titled "Defixiones, Will and Testament," she'll cover everything from song cycles by Armenian, Belgian, and Syrian poets to the blues of Blind Willie Johnson and Son House. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Dec. 1-2 and Dec. 4 at 8.)

MOXY FRÜVOUS—Harmonizing and high jinks with the former buskers from Toronto, whose latest album, "Thornhill," benefits from the mature touch of R.E.M. producer Don Dixon. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391. Dec. 1-2 at 8.)

QUEENSRYCHE—One of the more accomplished eighties heavy-metal bands is still banging heads. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Dec. 2 at 8.)

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE—Fluffy dance music still brings home the bulk of the music-biz bacon, but angry undergrad aggro-rock (as exemplified by Limp Bizkit, Korn, and this semiradical combo) has now become a seriously lucrative alternative. As of press time, "The Battle of Los Angeles," the latest tooth-rattling opus from Rage, was the No. 1 record in the land (selling more than four hundred and thirty thousand copies in its first week), having bested Mariah Carey by more than a hundred thousand units. Live, expect tirades about Che and Mumia with equal helpings of funk and fuzz. (Nassau Coliseum. 516-794-9300. Dec. 3 at 7:30.)

LA TROUPE MAKANDAL—A night of mesmerizing vodun jazz, led by the Haitian drum master Frisner Augustin. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information, call 545-7536. Dec. 4 at 8.)

"SONGS OF THE CENTURY"—Wispy-voiced neo-folkie Beth Orton, Texas-bred troubadour Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and singer-songwriters Marshall Crenshaw and Martha Wainwright tackle jazz, folk, blues, pop, and show tunes of the past hundred years. (St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. Dec. 4 at 8.)

"PIANOS FOR DUKE"—What better way to salute the quirky, utterly individual piano approach of Duke Ellington than by having three of the most idiosyncratic pianists of our day—Muhal Richard Abrams, Andrew Hill, and Geri Allen—play his music. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7100. Dec. 4 at 8.)

ASCENSÍON—The Latin-jazz band led by Bobby Sanabria is joined by Cándido, the seventy-eight-year-old conga legend. (Symphony Space. For more information, call 545-7536. Dec. 5 at 8.)

YES—The prog-rock leviathan returns to support its new album, "The Ladder." (Beacon Theatre. Dec. 7-9 at 8.)

EILEEN TRAVELL

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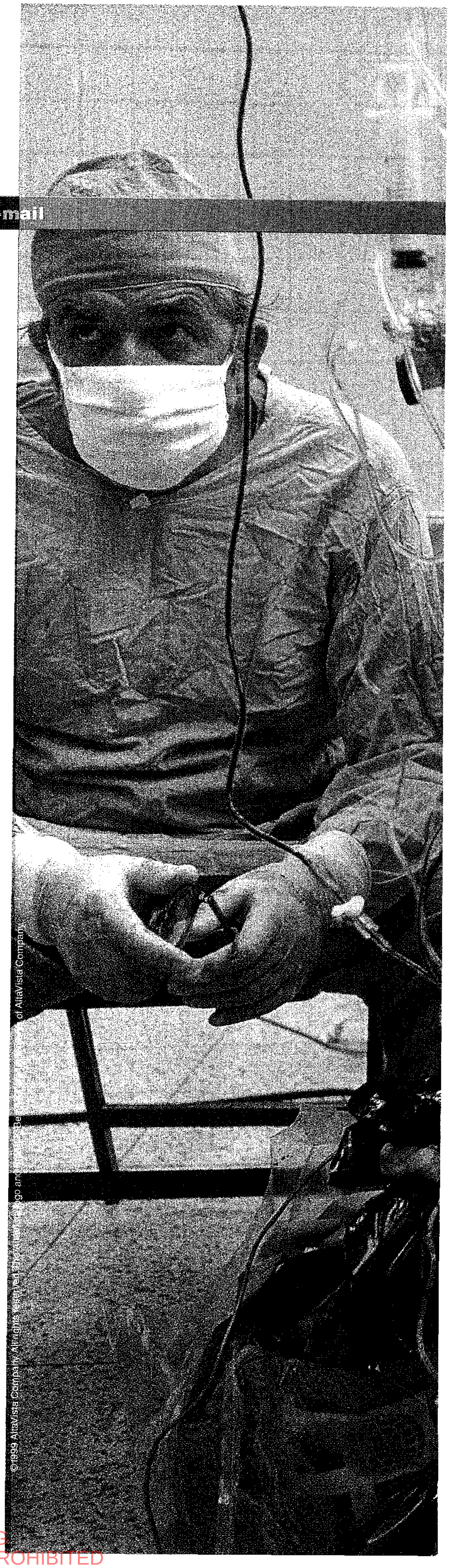

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CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bam Café, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Dec. 2: Singer-songwriter **DUNCAN SHEIK** and guitarist **GERRY LEONARD** play the spare tunes from Nick Drake's final album, "Pink Moon."

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 1: British folkie **WATERSON CARTHY.** Dec. 3-4: **JANE SIBERRY.** The eccentric Canadian singer-songwriter (sample title: "Everything Reminds Me of My Dog") delivers two evenings of otherworldly, and often extraordinary, inventiveness. Dec. 6: **ED PALERMO** and his big band play the music of Frank Zappa.

The Make Up, at the Bowery Ballroom.

JOHN RITTER

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 5: The Washington, D.C., quartet **THE MAKE UP,** purveyors of a self-described "gospel yeh, yeh" sound, rose from the ashes of the seminal hardcore band Nation of Ulysses. Its lead singer, Ian Svenonious, preaches with religious conviction, liberally sprinkling his performances with "amen"s. The group's new album, "Save Yourself," has a funky, dosed sixties sound, as if James Brown had been a member of the Doors. (See also Maxwell's.)

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dec. 3: One of the greatest soul and blues singers of the twentieth century, **BOBBY (BLUE) BLAND** is almost always on tour, usually opening for his friend B. B. King. This is a rare solo billing and shouldn't be missed.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Dec. 7: The quiet and wholesome folk-pop of the **INNOCENCE MISSION,** a trio formed thirteen years ago by high-school friends from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Lead singer Karen Peris has such a delicate and ethereal voice that it makes the band's songs sound as if they were relics of a lost era. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 2: Stephin Merritt, **THE MAGNETIC FIELDS'S** mastermind, has become one of New York's most respected underground artists and a reluctant antihero whose music is as catchy as his dour bons mots are clever. The Fields's latest work is the wildly eclectic CD "69 Love Songs." With **THE ALUMINUM GROUP,** the creation of two stylish brothers from Chicago, Frank and John Navin, with a love of good design (the group takes its name from furniture by Charles and Ray Eames) and intricately crafted songs. Their third album, "Pedals," which was produced by Windy City sonic genius Jim O'Rourke, is an eclectic mixture of living-room radio pop. Dec. 3: **MIKE NESS,** the husky-voiced guitarist from Social Distortion. Dec. 4: **THE DISCO BISCUITS** jam the night away. Dec. 7: Perhaps the first neo-swing group to actually sell records, the **SQUIRREL NUT ZIPPERS** offer a tongue-in-cheek homage to the big-band pantheon. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Dec. 1: **THE ALUMINUM GROUP** (see Irving Plaza). Dec. 3-4: **LLOYD COLE.** Still revered for his work with the underrated eighties mopers Lloyd Cole & the Commotions, Cole writes excoriating tunes that mix the wit of Elvis Costello with the gloom of Leonard Cohen. Dec. 3: **THE MAKE UP** (see the Bowery Ballroom) take over for the late show.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 1: Cracker guitarist **DAVID LOWERY.** Dec. 4-5: Eighties alterna-rockers **THE THE.** Dec. 6: Top-shelf Welsh rock and roll with **GORKY'S ZYGOTIC MYNCI.**

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Dec. 2: **BASEMENT BHANGRA,** an evening of ecstatic, futuristic dance music which fuses an ancient Punjabi harvest festival with the technological wonders of underground London. Dining.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Dec. 2-4: The **DAVE HOLLAND** quintet. Holland regularly assembles crack ensembles featuring smart players and off-kilter instrumentation. This lineup, for instance, includes saxophonist **CHRIS POTTER,** trombonist **ROBIN EUBANKS,** vibist **STEVE NELSON,** and drummer **BILLY KILSON.** But the focus only rarely strays from the leader, whose brilliant, industrial-strength bass work simultaneously grounds and propels the music, pushing his players into formidable post-bop improvisations. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Dec. 5: **MAX ROACH AND THE SO WHAT BRASS FIVE.** The sprightly septuagenarian drum titan Roach has yet to stop exploring diverse musical vistas and play it safe. The So What Brass Five's crisp orchestrations match Roach's punctilious approach to rhythm. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Dec. 31, **BOBBY SHORT.** . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

Iridium, 48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 5: The **TEDDY EDWARDS ALL STARS.** No less a player than the legendary trumpeter Fats Navarro once stated that Edwards had recorded the first true bop tenor-saxophone solo on "Up in Dodo's Room," in 1949. Despite this promising beginning and subsequent high-water marks—a stint with Max Roach and Clifford Brown in the early fifties, fruitful recordings with trumpeter Howard McGhee—Edwards has remained a bit of a mystery man, primarily because he's stayed on the West Coast. His infrequent New York appearances over the past five years reveal a stylist still in command of the bop idiom he helped develop. A full-bore rhythm team—pianist **KENNY DREW, JR.,** bassist **RODNEY WHITAKER,** and drummer **CARL ALLEN**—will keep Edwards on his toes. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Dec. 6: "Time Is of the Essence," **MICHAEL BRECKER'S** latest album, has a few distinct advantages in its star-studded personnel, which includes drummers Elvin Jones and Jeff (Tain) Watts and guitarist Pat Metheny. But Brecker himself has been growing by leaps and bounds, roughing up his tone, buffing his ideas, and allowing his good taste to come to the fore.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 1-4: **HENRY THREADGILL,** the visionary saxophonist and composer, didn't blink an eye in the early nineties when it came to putting together a band replete with electric guitarists and multiple tubas. Now he's scaled back his instrumentation but not his ambitions; his Make a Move ensemble fuses chamber jazz and world music to form a dazzling, as yet unnamed genre. Dec. 6: The **ALEX BLAKE** quartet. Judging from the crispness with which he plays the bass, and the spicy melodies he draws from it, Blake must have been a flamenco guitarist in a past life. In this life, though, he's been a trusted sideman for pianist Randy Weston and for the full-throated saxophonist **PHAROAH SANDERS,** who joins him here.

Makor, 35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—Dec. 1: The **GREG OSBY** quartet. Saxophonist Osby, a professional renegade associated with the jazz-insurgent M-Base organization, hasn't quite returned to the fold—let's just say he's reinvestigating the glories of the jazz tradition. Retaining his probing edge, Osby remains one of the sharpest and least predictable alto players to have emerged in the past two decades.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Dec. 5: The **DEWEY REDMAN** quartet. An integral member of Ornette Coleman's and Keith Jarrett's bands before striking out on his own, tenor saxophonist Redman was fusing earth-toned blues, free-jazz excursions, and reverential bop and ballads long before his celebrated son Joshua even knew which end of the sax you blew into. Dining.

Up Over Jazz Cafe, 351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Dec. 3-4: **LARRY RIDLEY'S JAZZ LEGACY ENSEMBLE.** Bassist and educator Ridley, whose résumé reads like a short history of modern jazz, has stocked his Jazz Legacy Ensemble with journeyman players—trumpeter **VIRGIL JONES,** saxophonist **CHARLES DAVIS,** pianist **RICHARD WYANS,** and drummer **JIMMY WORMWORTH**—whose own vast experience insures idiomatically correct and inspired playing no matter what the repertoire.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—At its peak in the mid-eighties, the coöperative band **SPHERE** (through Dec. 5) performed seamlessly, like a dream. Pianist **KENNY BARRON,** tenor saxophonist Charlie Rouse, bassist **BUSTER WILLIAMS,** and drummer **BEN RILEY** played with grace and nuance as if the very survival of those jazz qualities were at stake. Sphere disbanded when Rouse died, in 1988, but in a wise move Rouse's spot was recently offered to the biting alto saxophonist **GARY BARTZ,** who has successfully integrated his own voice into the ensemble. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—Dec. 2: The exceptional Cuban guitarist **JUAN-CARLOS FORMELL** and his band Cuba Libre pay tribute to the Latin-jazz innovator Chano Pozo. Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian jazz.

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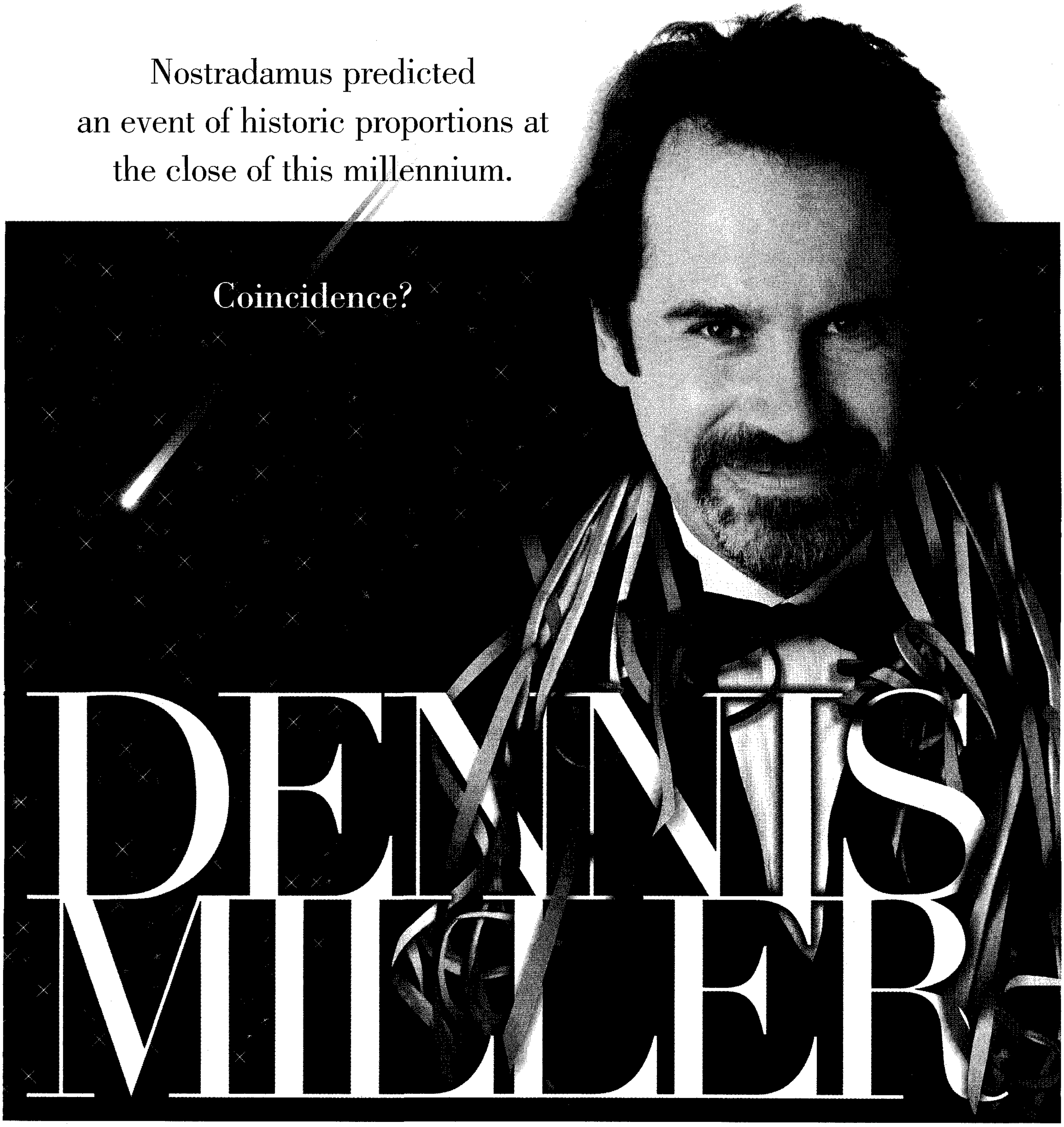

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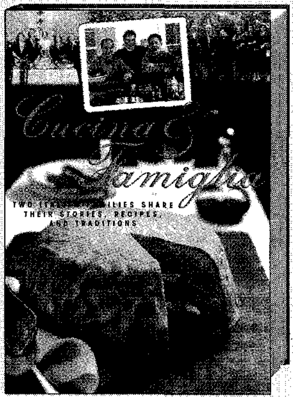
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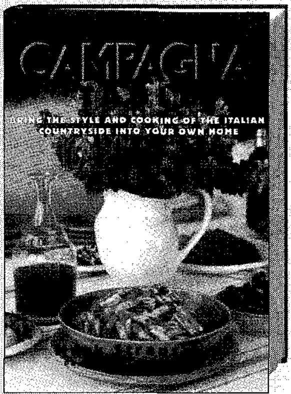
TWO ITALIAN FAMILIES SHARE THEIR STORIES, RECIPES, AND TRADITIONS

Cucina & Famiglia
Two Italian Families Share Their Stories, Recipes, and Traditions
Joan Tropiano Tucci and Gianni Scappin with Mimi Shanley Taft
Foreword by Stanley Tucci

A Mediterranean Feast

A Mediterranean Feast
The Story of the Birth of the Celebrated Cuisines of the Mediterranean, from the Merchants of Venice to the Barbary Corsairs, with More Than 500 Recipes
Clifford A. Wright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ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Only the Best: Masterpieces of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon" is home to eighty works, including paintings by Rubens, Fragonard, Turner, and Manet, while their permanent residence undergoes renovation. Through Feb. 27. . . . ¶ "Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch" offers forty paintings and ninety-two drawings of the nineteenth-century French élite. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ "Carleton Watkins: The Art of Perception" presents more than a hundred and twenty-five images by this pioneer of photography, who recorded the vastness of the American West. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties, covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Things" is the final installment of "Modern Starts," the current triumvirate of shows drawn from MOMA's permanent collection, all focussed on the years 1880-1920. Smaller than its counterparts "People" and "Places," "Things" occupies a single gallery on the ground floor and combines furniture, architectural elements, and decorative objects with photographs, paintings, and sculptures. The open floor plan is at odds with the show's thematic divisions, so that four magnificent Cézanne still-lifes of fruit seem inexplicably relegated to the "Guitars" area, with a group of Cubist paintings by Juan Gris, Picasso, and Le Corbusier. "People" runs through Feb. 1; "Places" and "Things" through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A retrospective devoted to the Neapolitan painter Francesco Clemente presents more than two hundred paintings, frescoes, watercolors, pastels, sculptures, illustrations, and collaborative works. Through Jan. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Part two of "The American Century" is a vast improvement over its predecessor, and not just because American art gathered momentum after the Second World War. The exhibition design as a whole is clearer: film clips and "historical" displays have been segregated to small side rooms, so they don't compete directly with the nearly seven hundred art works. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—*National Geographic* meets the East Village in "Body Art: Marks of Identity," which proves that long before there were drunken sailors there were tattoos, not to mention piercing, scarification, and body shaping. Pre-Colombian nose ornaments from Peru go head to head with contemporary photographs of the pierced natives of New York and San Francisco. Near the end there's a wonderful short film featuring a young woman with a tattoo of Lucy, the three-million-something-year-old hominid fossil, a reminder that everything old can be new again. Through May 29. . . . ¶ The museum's vivarium has again been filled with hundreds of lepidoptera who have everything they need—warmth, nectar, tour groups—to survive in the butterfly conservatory. Through Feb. 27. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Eastman Johnson: Painting America." Through Feb. 6. . . . ¶ "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection." Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION, 1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—To celebrate the quatercentenary of the artist's birth, most of New York City's small collection of Velázquez paintings have been united in one room. Along with familiar masterpieces from the Met and the Frick, the exhibit includes lesser-known works loaned by the Hispanic Society of America. Among these is a full-length portrait of the rueful-looking Count-Duke of Olivares, painted in the artist's earlier, slightly harder style. (The riding crop in the Count-Duke's right hand is not an emblem of his position as "Master of the King's Bedchamber.") For sheer charm, however, the highlights here are two small studies of young girls, one an elaborately coiffed princess, the other an unidentified commoner, possibly the artist's granddaughter. Through Jan. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

NAUM GABO (1890-1977)—This Russian Constructivist has the dubious distinction, along with Calder, of being a forefather of kinetic art. But Gabo's innovative approach helped revolutionize modern sculpture. The mini-retrospective includes work from his groundbreaking "Constructed Head" series, with a small sculpture from 1916, a large-scale version executed sixty years later and, most intriguing, a 1917 fold-up cardboard model smuggled out of Russia in a suitcase in the sixties, installed high in a corner like a pop-up book. A well-deserved review of a sculptor who is arguably as important, in his way, as Duchamp and Brancusi. Through Dec. 11. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.)

MICHELE ZALOPANY—Turgid oil pastels, based on found photographs and rendered in a grisaille palette. The one color canvas, "Intellectus Sacrificium Intellectus," depicts two men, presumably a Third World peddler and his mark, surveying a souvenir stand stocked with portraits of Lenin, Gandhi, and Marx among the usual clutter of tchotchkes. The painting's awkward chromatic scheme suggests a colorized movie. Through Dec. 4. (Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. 399-5510.)

"DREAMS 1900-2000: SCIENCE, ART AND THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND"—The Equitable marks the centennial of Freud's "On the Interpretation of Dreams" by cramming the walls with art, transforming the gallery into a claustrophobe's nightmare. The show starts promisingly, with an eerie, drippy Charles Burchfield watercolor, a characteristically creepy Hans Bellmer photograph, and a drawing that Pollock made for his analyst. But the contemporary selections are erratic, including a repellent Odd Nerdrum painting of what appears to be an imminent castration and a projection by Bill Viola that's the video equivalent of those New Age tabletop fountains. Through Feb. 26. (Seventh Ave. at 52nd St. 554-4818.)

SHORT LIST—DAVID BATES, DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111. Through Dec. 4. . . . **ERWIN BLUMENFELD,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through Dec. 23. . . . **JAMES BROOKS,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 397-6780. Through Dec. 23. . . . **KAREN GIUSTI,** Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 414-8511. Through Dec. 22. (See also Chelsea Short List.) . . . **LESLIE LERNER,** Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323. Through Dec. 18. . . . **CILDO MEIRELES,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470. Through Jan. 15. . . . **REEVE SCHLEY,** Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at

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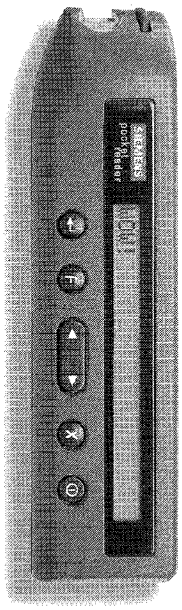

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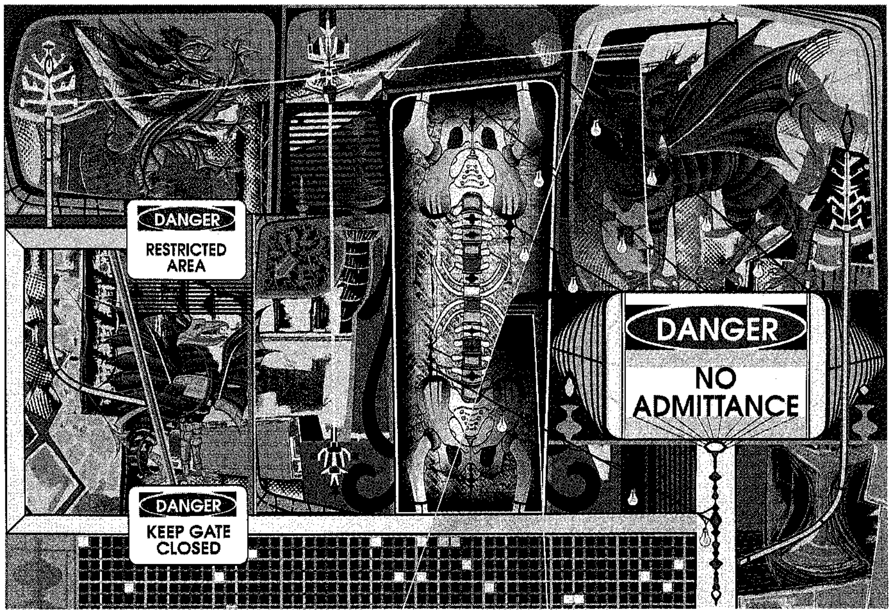
78th St. 535-5767. Through Dec. 23.... **RICHARD SERRA,** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 744-2313. Through Jan. 14.... **SAUL STEINBERG,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. 861-7338. Through Dec. 18.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

LARI PITTMAN—This L.A. artist is painting's pack rat, filling every last inch of his surfaces with imagery and ornamentation. Griffins and danger signs vie with hand bones and hipbones; generic teen idols mingle with oil tankers and cruets labelled "merlot" or "semen." Pittman is after simultaneity, not overload, and the compositions succeed like a well-run three-ring circus: you don't know where to look first, but it doesn't matter. Through Dec. 23. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)



"With appreciation I will have had understood the decorum of my mobility," from an exhibition of works by Lari Pittman, at Barbara Gladstone.

RACHEL WHITEREAD—An elegiac show of nine identical pairs of sculptures, cast from mortuary slabs. Though made of bronze, the gleaming surfaces mimic the original porcelain. The complementary convex-concave pairs make for a soulful comment on Minimalism. The casting process itself serves as an inverted metaphor for death: absence made presence. There's a creepy, antiseptic silence to the room which fits the subject. But it also lends a kinky aura, as if a dominatrix in patent leather and a nurse's cap might sweep in at any moment. Through Dec. 18. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)

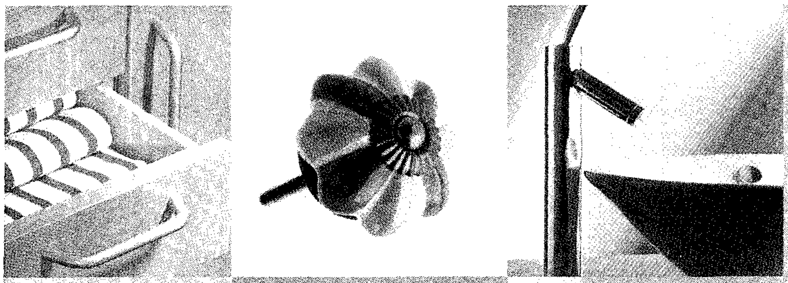
THOMAS WOODRUFF—"All Systems Go," a delightful two-gallery extravaganza with a tongue-in-cheek sci-fi flavor. Rocket ships appear in nearly every one of these canvases shaped like shields or Gothic windows, but the real subject is a kind of defiant whimsy, implicitly addressed to the age of AIDS. (We don't know where those rocket ships are taking people, but they're not coming back.) Bursting with fanciful allegorical narratives, Woodruff's images focus on the artist's family and friends, surrounded by a lavish supporting cast of hummingbirds, zebras, goldfish, and "slug fairies," not to mention tulips, diamonds, and rainbows. These are altarpieces of maximalism, painted with a glittering technical prowess: imagine that Jack Smith, of "Flaming Creatures" fame, had been trained as a Pre-Raphaelite. Through Dec. 23. (Debs, 529 W. 20th St., 647-7080; P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St., 941-8642. Both shows through Dec. 23.)

SHORT LIST—**RICHMOND BURTON,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Jan. 1.... **JOHN CURRIN,** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000. Through Dec. 4.... **CARROLL DUNHAM,** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Through Dec. 4.... **TONY FEHER,** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through Dec. 23.... **KAREN GIUSTI,** Nikolai, 505 W. 22nd St. 414-8511. Through Dec. 13.... **MONA HATOUM,** Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 367-7474. Through Dec. 4.... **MARTIN HONERT,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Dec. 24.... **PAM LINS,** Ten in One, 526 W. 26th St. 604-9660. Through Dec. 18.... **MARIA MARSHALL,** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Through Dec. 23.... **STEPHEN MURPHY,** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through Dec. 23.... **RICHARD SERRA,** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 228-2828. Through Feb. 26.... **PAT STEIR,** Marlborough, 211 W. 19th St. 463-8634. Through Jan. 1.... **JOHN WESLEY,** Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Through Dec. 4.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

JEFF KOONS—Titled "Easyfun," these latest products from the M.B.A. sector of the art world look as peppy and smug as ever. The main offering here is a group of colored mirrors, cut in cute cartoon animal shapes. "Donkey" is orange, "Hippo" is pink, etc. A trio of paintings on canvas include familiar sixties Pop motifs like enlarged Cheerios and chocolate-chip cookies splashing down into bowls of milk. Someone might want to tell Koons's assistants (the people who actually execute these paintings) to turn down the Rosenquist dial. Through Dec. 18. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160.)

ISSEY MIYAKE—The Ace gallery puts on a museum-quality installation extravaganza (and, like a museum, charges gallerygoers to see it). The entry hall glitters with a gold-and-silver recycling project that stretches from floor to ceiling—cast-off clothes pressed between sheets of foil that betray the shimmering outlines of old socks, jeans, and T-shirts. Miyake has engineered a great range of effects: in one room, sixteen of the designer's airy and outlandish outfits—origami ninja suits, Cat-in-the-Hat party jammies, Noguchi-lamp outfits—bounce in the air with a weird jauntiness. A giant roll of tube-knit black dresses snakes from one mannequin to the next. Down the hall, computer projections of single sheets of fabric morph into dresses or outfits, and projecting this transubstantiation onto the gallery's cement floor creates a ghostly effect—as though only our clothes had the power to rise from the grave. Through Feb. 29. (275 Hudson St. 255-5599.)



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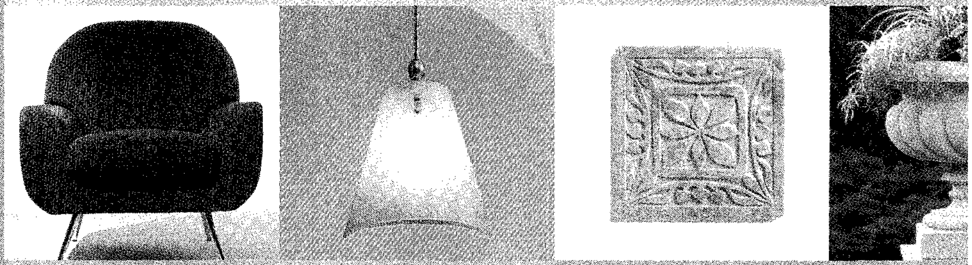

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Frank Stella—To judge from the lack of buzz, this Young Turk turned éminence grise is going through a lull. Except for his early sixties stripe paintings, Stella's is not a name to conjure with in art schools; the Whitney snubbed him in its centennial survey; and his exhibitions, as the artist admits, no longer routinely sell out. Reputation aside, however, Stella continues to outperform pretty much everyone else working today. His mural-size paintings and steel-and-aluminum sculptures (partly based on computer models of a spiralling smoke ring) are gorgeously anarchic, but the surprise is a white fibreglass model for a band-shell structure soon to be built in Miami. Inspired by the silhouette of a Brazilian beach hat, it's a dizzying, baroque confection, more aerial, and no less ambitious, than recent work by Frank Gehry and Richard Serra. Not to be missed. Through Dec. 11. (Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685.)

Short List—RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER, Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753. Through Dec. 18.... GORDON MATTA-CLARK, Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through Dec. 24.... SARAH MORRIS, Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466. Through Dec. 22.... ROB WYNNE, Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. 941-5777. Through Dec. 23.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Dec. 1: An auction of American paintings, including George Bellows's "Polo Crowd" (long considered one of his seminal works), Winslow Homer's "The Red Canoe" (a vivid watercolor of an Adirondack scene), and fifteen panels painted in 1953 by Ludwig Bemelmans for Aristotle Onassis's yacht, depicting scenes relating to the artist's well-known "Madeline" books.... ¶ Dec. 2: Eighty-one important pieces—clocks, astrolabes, and so on—being deacquisitioned by the Time Museum, in Rockford, Illinois.... ¶ Dec. 3-4: A two-day sale of twentieth-century decorative art, including (on Dec. 4) lamps and glass panels by Louis Comfort Tiffany.... ¶ Dec. 7: Fine books and manuscripts, particularly impressive in American items.... ¶ Dec. 8-9: Coins. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Dec. 1: Sporting art, including notable works by Sir Alfred J. Munnings.... ¶ Dec. 2-3: Wines.... ¶ Dec. 7: Coins. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.) . . . At CHRISTIE'S EAST: Dec. 1: Native American art.... ¶ Dec. 2: Decorative art from the collection of Barbra Streisand, along with such items as her monogrammed towels and a selection of blankets from her personal screening room. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430.)

Doyle—Dec. 1: An Americana auction that includes several items relating to George Washington.... ¶ Dec. 2: Estate jewelry, including pieces by Cartier, Tiffany, and Patek Philippe.... ¶ Dec. 7: European and American paintings and sculptures, including numerous oils and watercolors from the estate of the painter Ogden Pleissner. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

Swann—Printed and manuscript Americana. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. Dec. 2-3.)

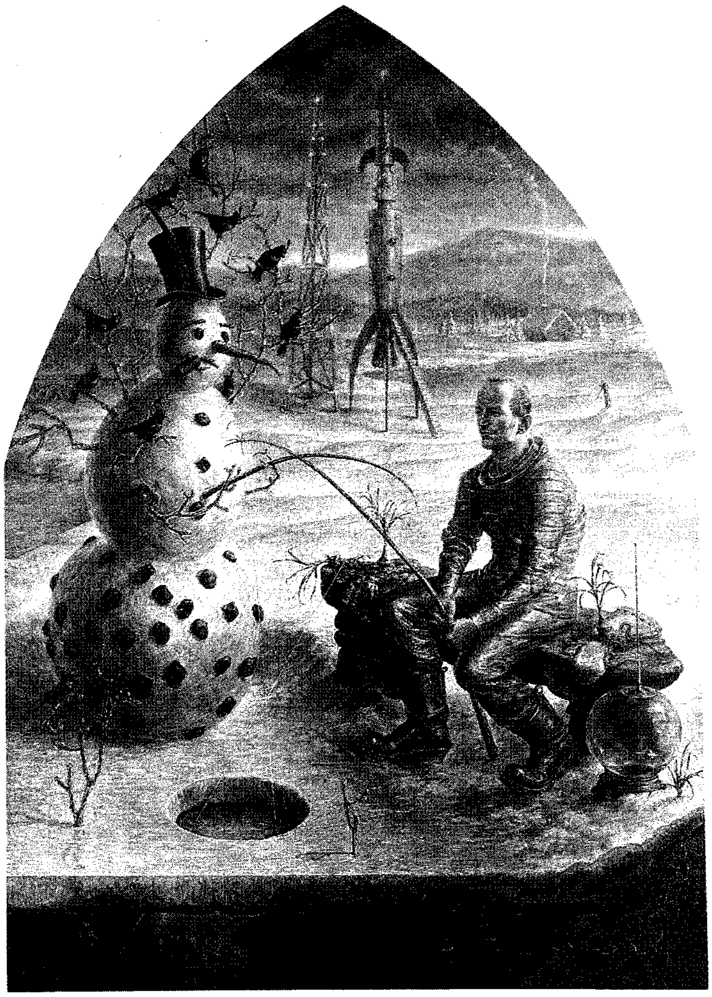
Antiquorum—Jewelry, rare gemstones, and collectible watches. (Grand Havana Room, 666 Fifth Ave. Dec. 1. For information, call 750-1103.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Bill Owens—Black-and-white photographs from Owens's landmark book, "Suburbia." Through Dec. 4. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

"Walker Evans at *Fortune*"—Works made during Evans's twenty years (1945-65) as staff photographer and photo editor at *Fortune*. Through Dec. 4. (Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292.)

Short List—MICHAEL ACKERMAN, Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 7; through Nov. 30.... TOM BARIL, Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Dec. 11.... TINA BARNEY, Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Dec. 18.... JAYNE HINDS BIDAUT and LARRY GIANETTINO, Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819. Both shows through Jan. 15.... BRASSAÏ, Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Jan. 8.... LINDA CONNOR AND ROSALIND SOLOMON, Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444. Through Dec. 4.... MASAHISA FUKASE, Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600. Through Dec. 11.... TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS, Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Dec. 18.... THOMAS STRUTH, Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Dec. 31.... JERRY UELSMANN, Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Through Dec. 24.... ANDY WARHOL, Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 563-4474. Through Dec. 30.



"Mission Poesy: Spaceman with Snowman" by Thomas Woodruff, from his two-gallery show, at Debs and P.P.O.W.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Avery Fisher Hall is 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

Artek—The early-music ensemble performs Christmas music from Renaissance and Baroque Italy and Spain, including Domenico Mazzocchi's "Per il Santo Natale." (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Dec. 2 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

"Amahl and the Night Visitors"—Menotti's opera about the first Christmas, in its annual staging by the Little Orchestra Society. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 4 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3.)

Pomerium—Alexander Blachly directs his thirteen-member a-cappella ensemble in Christmas music from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including festive works by Dufay, Palestrina, and Lassus. (The Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park. 650-2280. Dec. 5 at 1 and 3.)

Handel's "Messiah"—The "Messiah" season begins with a performance of the Christmas portion by the Holy Trinity Choir and soloists, directed by Stephen Hamilton. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. Dec. 5 at 4. Tickets at the door.)

BachWorks—Johannes Somary directs two advent cantatas by Bach, "Wachet Auf" (No. 140) and "Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland" (No. 61). (St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 315 W. 22nd St. Dec. 5 at 5. Tickets at the door.)

Choral Symphony Society and New York Cantata Singers—For the eighth consecutive season, David Labovitz leads all six cantatas of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio." Walter Hilse accompanies with an organ reduction. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Dec. 5 at 6:30. Tickets at the door.)

Chanticleer—The twelve-member men's vocal ensemble presents three concerts. Dec. 6 at 8:15: Medieval and Renaissance works, two pieces by John Tavener, and numerous carol arrangements, among other works. (Grace Church, Broadway at 10th St. 254-2000.) . . . ¶ Dec. 7 at 6:30 and 8:30: A wide-ranging Christmas program. (Medieval Sculpture Hall, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—Boito's MEFISTOFELE, with Aprile Millo, Richard Leech, and Dean Peterson; conducted by Mark Elder. (Dec. 1 at 7:30 and Dec. 4 at 1:30.) . . . OTELLO, with Gabriela Beňačková, Vladimir Bogachov, and Sergei Leiferkus; Mr. Elder. (Dec. 2 at 7:30.) . . . TRISTAN UND ISOLDE, with Jane Eaglen, Wendy White, Ben Heppner, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, and Paul Plishka; James Levine. (Dec. 3 at 7.) . . . With René Pape instead of Mr. Plishka. (Dec. 6 at 7.) . . . L'ELISIR D'AMORE, with Angela Gheorghiu, Roberto Alagna, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, and Mr. Plishka; Evelino Pidò. (Dec. 4 at 8.) . . . LE NOZZE DI FIGARO, with Amanda Roocroft, Barbara Bonney, Susanne Mentzer, Bo Skovhus, and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo; Edo de Waart. (Dec. 7 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Nixon in China"—John Adams's opera, premièred in 1987, receives a concert revival, with Robert Spano leading the Brooklyn Philharmonic. The cast includes baritones James Maddalena (as Richard Nixon, a role he created) and William Sharp (as Chou En-lai) and soprano Heather Buck (as Pat Nixon). (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 3-4 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—At Avery Fisher Hall, the orchestra's Copland festival continues. Dec. 2 at 8: Four conductors share duties at the podium in a program of ballet scores by Copland: Markand Thakar, leading a suite from "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!"; Leslie B. Dunner, conducting "Dance Panels"; George Hanson, directing the "Dance Symphony"; and Miguel Harth-Bedoya, overseeing the "Appalachian Spring" suite in its full orchestral version. . . . ¶ Dec. 3-4 at 8: John Adams conducts the "Party Scene" from the opera "The Tender Land," "Music for the Theatre," the Piano Concerto (featuring Garrick Ohlsson), the "Danzón Cubano," the "Three Latin American Sketches," and the "Billy the Kid" Suite. . . ¶ Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 9 at 8: Marin Alsop conducts "El Salón México," "Statements," "Connotations," "Quiet City" (with trumpeter Philip Smith and English hornist Thomas Stacy), and "Music for a Great City." . . . **note:** Roundtables, lectures, and performances precede each concert, including, on Dec. 7 and Dec. 9, two separate programs of Copland's choral works, featuring the Westminster Choir.

American Symphony Orchestra—Leon Botstein conducts works written in Vienna during the eighteen-seventies and eighties: Ignaz Brüll's "The Golden Cross" Overture, Karl Goldmark's Violin Concerto (with Chantal Juillet), and Bruckner's Symphony No. 4 (in the edition prepared by Bruckner's pupil Ferdinand Löwe, which includes numerous "improvements" that were apparently foisted on the easily swayed composer—though Mr. Botstein believes otherwise). (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 1 at 8.)

Manhattan Chamber Sinfonia—Glen Barton Cortese leads Ezra Laderman's Concerto for Chamber Orchestra, Bernstein's Serenade (featuring violinist Glenn Dicterow), and Schumann's "Rhenish" Symphony. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Dec. 1 at 8.)

Paula Robison and Friends—The flutist is joined by fortepianist Kenneth Cooper and a chamber orchestra of colleagues for works by Mozart, Rossini, and others. (Temple of Dendur, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Dec. 3-4 at 7.)

New Amsterdam Singers—Clara Longstreth directs a wide-ranging program that includes Schütz's "Psalm 121" and Penderecki's "Cherubim Song." (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park W. at 65th St. Dec. 3 at 8 and Dec. 5 at 4. For information about tickets, call 568-5948.)

Russian Chamber Chorus of New York—Nikolai Kachanov directs Tchaikovsky's "Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom." (St. James Chapel, Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 662-2133. Dec. 4 at 3:30. . . . ¶ St. Ignatius Episcopal Church, West End Ave. at 87th St. Dec. 5 at 4. For information about tickets, call 718-445-5799.)

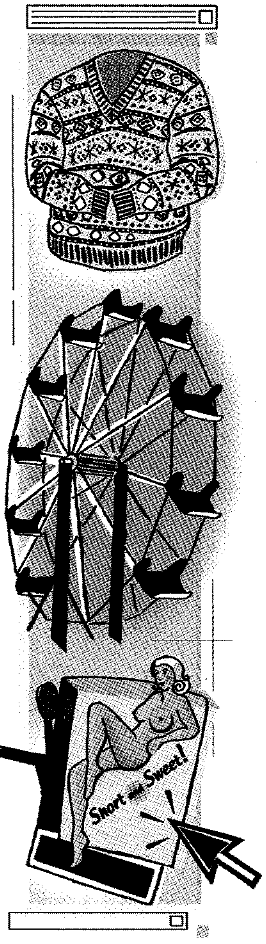
Met Orchestra—James Levine conducts Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht," Messiaen's "Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum," Debussy's "Danses Sacrée et Profane," and two works spotlighting mezzo-soprano Olga Borodina: Ravel's "Shéhérazade" and Berlioz's "La Mort de Cléopâtre." (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 5 at 3.)

Dessoff Choirs—The chorus launches its seventy-fifth season by performing several Baroque selections in arrangements by Paul Boepple (who led the group for more than three decades), in addition to Poulenc's "Quatre Motets pour le Temps de Noël," Frank Martin's Mass for Double Choir, and Morten Lauridsen's "O Magnum Mysterium." Kent Tritle directs. (Church of St. Ignatius

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Net Worth

On the Web, as in life, dullness can easily get you down. The past year has seen an explosion of bloated shopping-mall Web sites, but, alas, mere girth is no guarantor of really interesting merchandise. On the other hand, a little assiduous mousing around will turn up more than a few arcane sites that should appeal to the deskbound flaneur.


Short and Sweet!

The ever-growing ranks of Beatophiles will appreciate **KEROUAC.COM**, which offers ephemera ranging from Jack Kerouac key chains—miniature metal books with the author's name on the cover ($4.95)—to achingly innocent calendars that promise to take you "into North Beach coffeehouses and Greenwich Village hideaways" ($6.95). A rare recording of the mercurial Neal Cassady reading from his 1965 "verbal joyride"—a work entitled "Drive"—has been reformulated for CD (so you can listen to it while driving) and is $20.

Not nearly as intellectually demanding but arguably as raffish are the items at **ALCHEMY-GOTHIC.COM**, a site that claims to carry "a unique range of alternative necrossentials." Seventy dollars buys a skull-cherub belt buckle that certainly seems necrossential enough. It sports a two-tone, bronze, hand-polished skull wearing a red crystal-studded crown and accompanied by a pair of straight-faced seraphim.

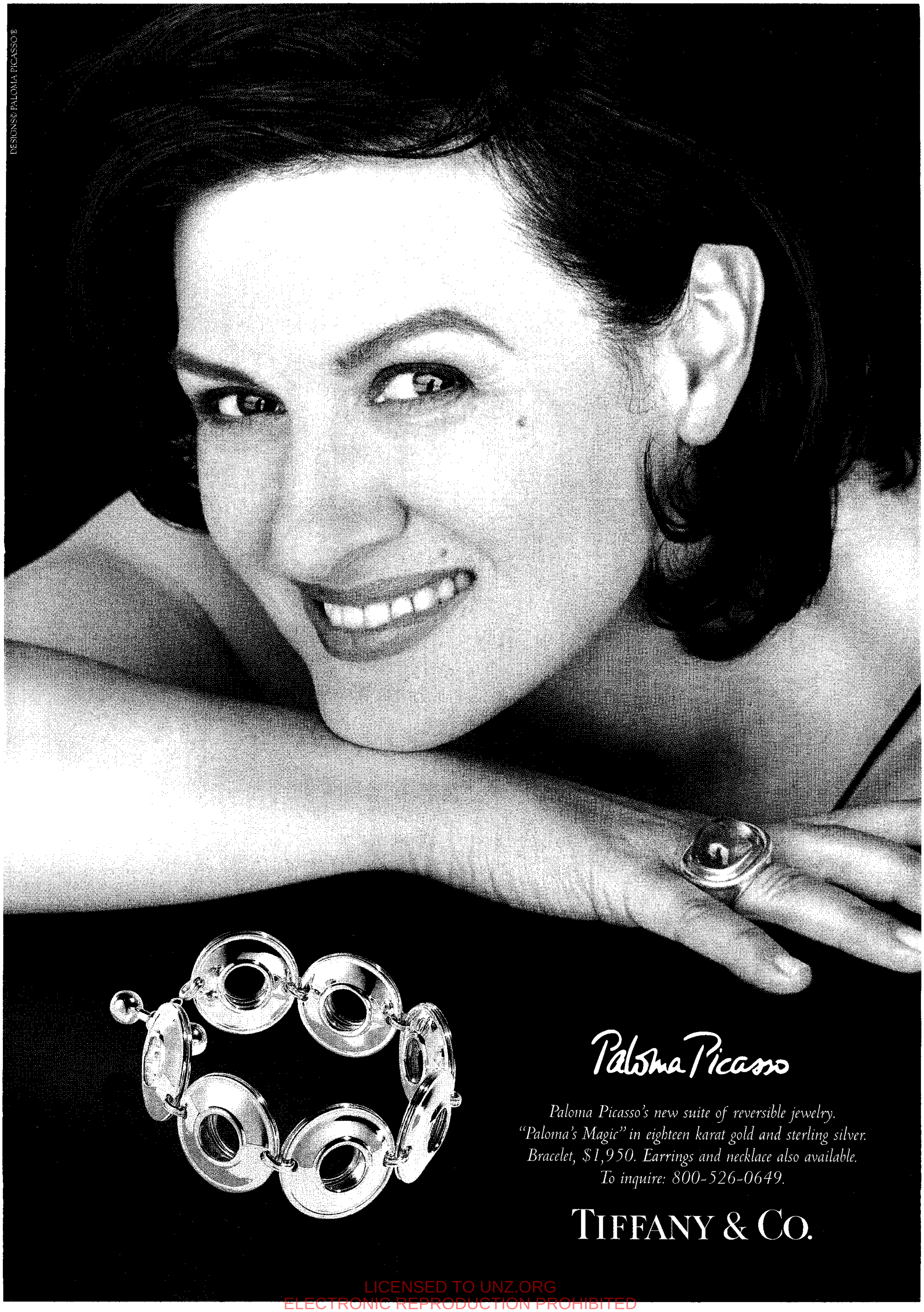
The less sinister obsessives behind **MATCHCOVER.COM** can provide you with another conversation piece—or pieces—namely an assortment of midcentury "girlie" matchbooks with covers that feature Vargas-like pinups ($43.75 for a lot of twenty-five). The voluptuous girlies in question are demure even when they're stark naked: one young lady wearing an upswept bun and little else has been pressed into service extolling the home-cooked food at Lyford's restaurant in Brownville Junction, Maine.

Collectibles of a different sort are the stock-in-trade at **ALVR.COM**, the online version of the venerable Manhattan jewelry store À la Vieille Russie, and a surprisingly perky Web site it is, considering that the shop is so august that it has been known to daunt the most fearless shoppers. (alvr.com is lighthearted enough to highlight an "item of the month": at the moment, a twenty-karat diamond floral brooch, circa 1820.) Instead of posting prices, the site invites you to E-mail for further info, which, come to think of it, is a lot better than having a salesperson see your face fall when you're told that the price of a spectacular five-sided early-Victorian pendant made of peridots, rubies, and diamonds is $24,500.

The pullovers at **SHETLAND-HANDKNITS.ZETNET.CO.UK** may be brand new, but they have deep roots. The site opens with a photo of a pipe-smoking Shetland Islander so grizzled he looks as if he'd be thrown by a box camera, let alone an iBook. Among a variety of exquisitely rendered numbers is a classic Fair Isle V neck in the exact pattern of madder, indigo, and "scrotie" (a natural yellow dye from lichen) which Edward VIII liked to wear while tooling around the Royal and Ancient at St. Andrews (165 pounds sterling). Accompanying berets, scarves, and gloves are a bargain at 22.75, 36.50, and 17.50 pounds, respectively.

If abdicators' sweaters, bawdy matchbooks, and Beat-obilia are still a little tame for your tastes, **USEDRIDES.COM** is poised to satisfy fantasies that involve spinning, twirling, hurtling, and looping the loop. Twenty gambolling gold-maned horses and a couple of chariots enliven a fifty-year-old Allen Herschel merry-go-round that has been completely reconditioned and is available for sale ($45,000) or lease; a circa-1976 Ferris wheel that glows with the neon splendor of a thousand long-lost childhood summers is so seductive you may consider, if only for a minute, forking over the $35,000 price—or, at the very least, downloading the picture.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ



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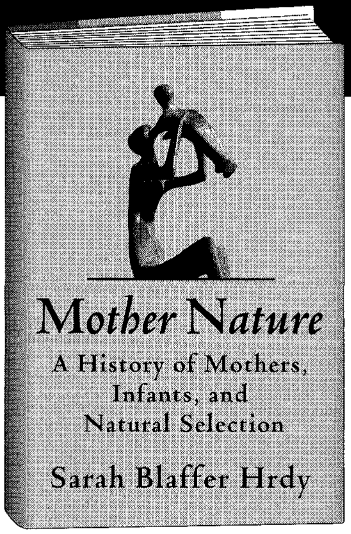

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Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. Dec. 5 at 3. For information about tickets, call 831-8224.)

Jupiter Symphony—Jens Nygaard conducts Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" (with violinist Stephanie Chase) and Bach's C-Major Concerto for Three Keyboard Instruments (featuring three accomplished avocational pianists—two lawyers and a physician). (Good Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66 St. Dec. 6 at 2 and 7 and Dec. 7 at 8. For information about tickets for these benefit concerts, call 799-1259.)

St. Cecilia Chorus and Orchestra—David Randolph leads Handel's "Israel in Egypt." (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 7 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio—The ensemble performs Ravel's Piano Trio and is assisted by violist Pinchas Zukerman in piano quartets by Mozart (in G Minor) and Dvořák (in E-Flat Major, Op. 87). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Dec. 1 at 8.)

Music by Ben Weber—Cellists Joel Krosnick and Dorothy Lawson, pianist Gilbert Kalish, the New York Woodwind Quintet, and others gather to perform works by this largely forgotten American modernist, who died in 1979. The program also includes the premières of pieces in tribute to Weber, by Milton Babbitt, Michael Colgrass, Lou Harrison, Ned Rorem, Francis Thorne, and Roger Tréfousse. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Dec. 1 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Presenting two independent chamber ensembles at Alice Tully Hall this week. Dec. 1 at 8: The Guarneri Quartet, performing quartets by Dvořák (in E-Flat Major, Op. 51) and Mendelssohn (in F Minor), and, with violist Ida Kavafian assisting, Brahms's G-Major String Quintet. . . . ¶ Dec. 5 at 5 and Dec. 7 at 7:30: The Golub-Kaplan-Karr Trio, offering piano trios by Brahms (in C Minor) and Nicholas Maw; in addition, the Chinese soprano Ying Huang (who gained an international following with her appearance in the title role in the 1995 film of "Madama Butterfly") sings a set of Fauré songs and joins the ensemble for several of Haydn's folk-song settings. (875-5050.)

Bargemusic—Presenting works by Schubert and Tchaikovsky, in addition to piano quartets by Mozart (in G Minor) and Mendelssohn (in F Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Dec. 2 at 7:30 and Dec. 5 at 4.)

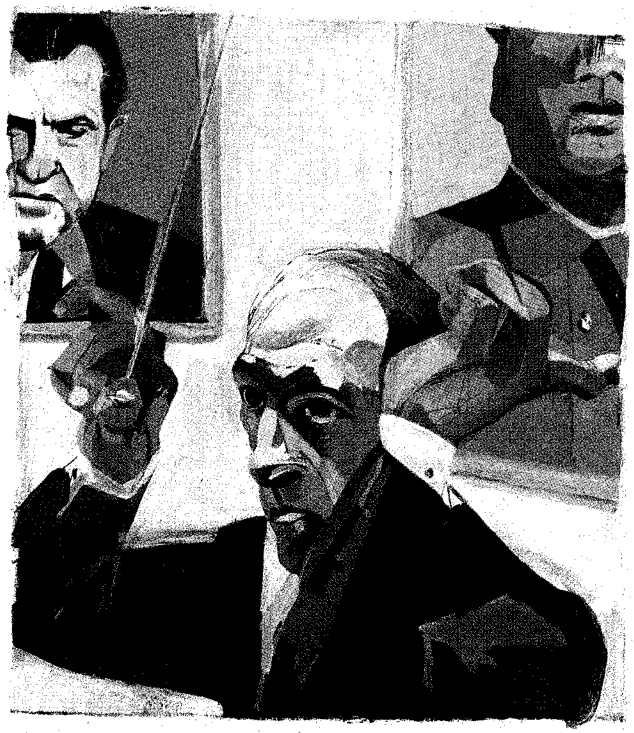
New York Philomusica—A Baroque program, comprising concertos by Vivaldi, Jan Dismas Zelenka, and Bach (including his Sixth "Brandenburg" Concerto). (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 2 at 8.)

"Twentieth-Century Retrospectives"—The second of two programs in this series, which explores the musical formation and legacy of Nadia Boulanger, spotlights works by five composers who studied with her, at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau or in her private studio in Paris: Elliott Carter's "Con Leggerezza Pensosa," Thea Musgrave's "Postcards from Spain," Virgil Thomson's Études for Piano (at least some of them), Philip Glass's "Mad Rush," and Copland's Sextet. (Paul Hall, Juilliard School, 155 W. 65th St. Dec. 3 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

Flux String Quartet—Performing works by Ornette Coleman, John Zorn, and Conlon Nancarrow. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Dec. 3 at 8.)

Evgeny Kissin—The pianist offers Rachmaninoff's "Études-Tableaux" (Op. 39) and a transcription of his "Vocalise," in addition to Scriabin's Sonata No. 3 and Balakirev's familiar finger-twister, "Islamey." (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 4 at 7:30.)

Kurt Nikkanen—Performing violin works by Corelli, Sarasate, and others. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Dec. 5 at 11 A.M. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)



Robert Spano, conducting John Adams's opera "Nixon in China," with the Brooklyn Philharmonic, at BAM.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

Deep Four—A quartet of double-bassists team up to play arrangements of pieces by Vivaldi, Monteverdi, and others. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Dec. 5 at noon.)

Garrick Ohlsson—The pianist offers Beethoven's Sonatas in B-Flat Major (Op. 22) and A-Flat Major (Op. 110), in addition to Copland's Piano Variations and several works by Chopin. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. Dec. 5 at 2. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

André Watts—The pianist performs two of his own Bach transcriptions, in addition to Schubert's Impromptu in A-Flat Major, Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata, a group of late works by Liszt, and Chopin's Sonata in B Minor. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 5 at 3.)

New York Philharmonic Ensembles—Members of the orchestra perform Karel Husa's "Évocations de Slovakie"; Martinů's Quartet for Clarinet, French Horn, Cello, and Percussion; Copland's Nonet; and Dvořák's Piano Quartet in D Major (Op. 23). (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 5 at 3.)

Sonic Boom Festival—The twentieth-century-music celebration reaches its close, at the Great Hall, Cooper Union. Dec. 5 at 8: Newband serves as the repository for the collection of oddball musical instruments invented by the late Harry Partch. The group has led a peripatetic existence in the past decade due to shifts in the availability of real estate, and has at times parked its instrumentarium

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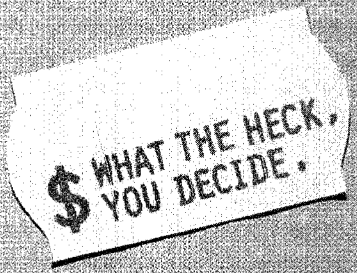

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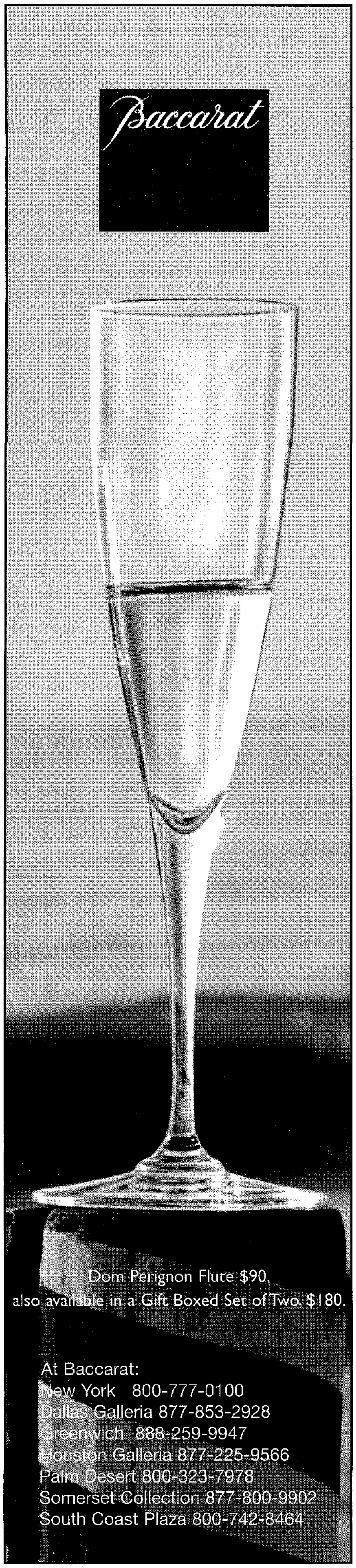
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in a Manhattan loft, at Nyack High School, at the State University at Purchase, and in a cardboard-box factory in Rockland County. Since August, the members of Newband have hung their hats—and their cloud-chamber bowls, chromelodeons, and zoomoozophones—at Montclair State University, in New Jersey. For this concert, they'll transport them to the East Village to present excerpts from Partch's hobo opera "The Wayward," as well as works by Dean Drummond, the ensemble's director. . . . ¶ Dec. 6 at 8: Speculum Musicae brings the festival to its close with a program of music by contemporary British composers Bayan Northcott (a première), Harrison Birtwistle, Colin Matthews, and Simon Bainbridge. (Third Ave. at 7th St. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

Young Concert Artists—In a recital spotlighting musicians whose careers have been (or are being) launched by the organization, Yayoi Toda plays Bach's D-Minor Chaconne for Unaccompanied Violin, Rafal Kwiatkowski assists her in Kodály's Duo for Violin and Cello, and Christopher O'Riley completes the ensemble for Shostakovich's E-Minor Piano Trio. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 6 at 7. For information about tickets, call 307-6655.)

Emanuel Ax—Performing piano sonatas by Haydn (in A-Flat Major, Hob. XVI:46) and Chopin (in B Minor) and Corigliano's "Fantasia on an Ostinato," among other works. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 6 at 7:30.)

"Piano Perles"—Pianists Michael Boriskin, Esther Budiardjo, Leon Fleisher, Horacio Gutiérrez, Seymour Lipkin, and Russell Sherman take turns performing solo pieces by George Perle, whose eighty-fifth birthday, although not until next May, will be celebrated this evening. The program includes the première of his "Musical Offerings," which here falls to Mr. Fleisher. (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 6 at 8.)

Washington Square Contemporary Music Society—Pieces by Elizabeth Hoffman, Tristan Murail, Birtwistle, Schuller, Joel-François Durand, and Jeff Nichols. (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 7 at 8.)

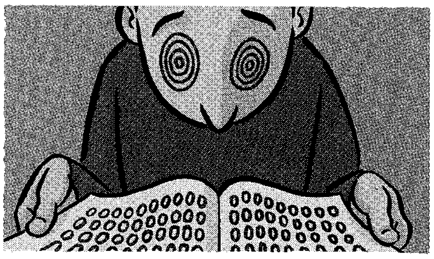
ABOVE AND BEYOND

Readings—Dec. 1 at 6:30: By poet Charles Bernstein. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 1 at 8: By Pete Hamill, from his biography of Diego Rivera. (Rocky Sullivan's, 129 Lexington Ave., at 29th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 2 at 6:30: By poets Mark Doty, Sophie Cabot Black, Vijay Seshadri, and Nick Flynn, in an evening celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Graywolf Press. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. For reservations, which are required, call 651-641-0077.) . . . ¶ Dec. 3 at 10:30: By spoken-word divas Lydia Lunch and Nicole Blackman. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Dec. 5 at 2: By poet Patricia Spears Jones. (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. For reservations, which are required, call 718-549-3200, ext. 308.)

Talks—Dec. 2 at 7: J. J. Lee, professor of Irish studies at New York University, joins Kerby Miller, author of "Emigrants and Exiles," and Peter Quinn, author of "Banished Children of Eve," for a discussion titled "Locating Irish America at the Millennium: From Somewhere to Nowhere—or Everywhere?" (Main Building, New York University, 100 Washington Sq. E., at Waverly Pl. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 2 at 7: Producer Ismail Merchant, director James Ivory, and screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala talk about making movies together. (Barnard Hall, Barnard College, Broadway at 117th St. 854-8021.) . . . ¶ Dec. 6 at 6: Gerald M. Friedman, professor of earth and environmental sciences at the City University of New York, explains how Troy, New York, became the birthplace of American geological science. (New York Academy of Sciences, 2 E. 63rd St. No tickets necessary.)

BOOK CURRENTS

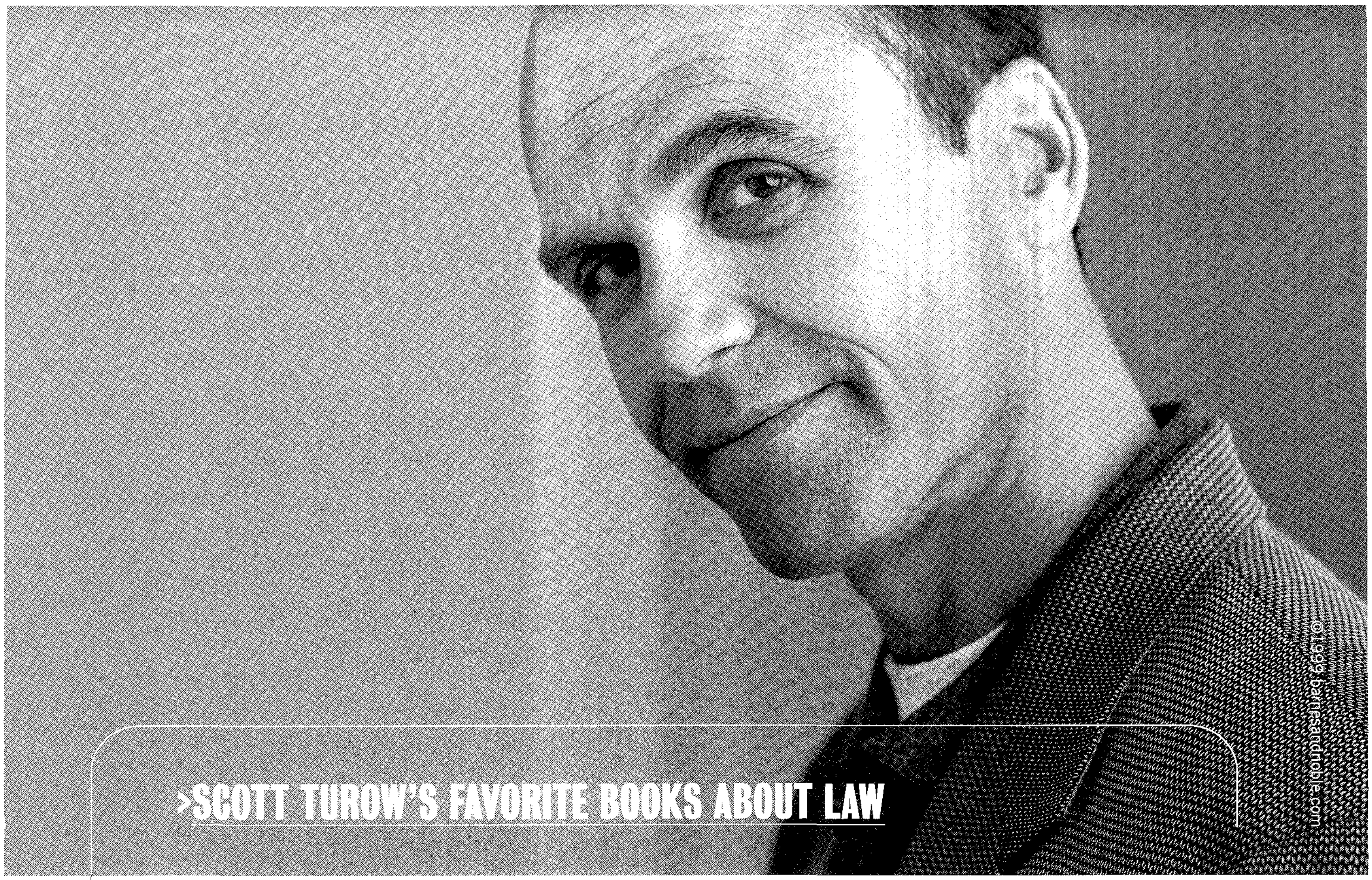
Zero Worship


CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Even without such a technological wrinkle as Y2K, the turning of the century has long inspired heated debate over the number zero. In 1799, the London *Times* became fed up with the question of whether new centuries begin in the year '00 or the year '01 and dismissed the whole idea as "silly" and "childish." Charles Seife's forthcoming book, **Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea** (Viking), is a historical and philosophical tribute to the most "innocent-looking" of numbers. Seife points out that the confusion about the accurate date on which to break out the millennial party hats is the fault of medieval monks, who, in devising the Gregorian calendar, were ignorant of one simple yet all-significant number—zero—so that, retroactively, New Year's Eve in 1 B.C. led directly to New Year's Day in 1 A.D.

Robert Kaplan's ode to "puckish zero," **The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero** (Oxford), chronicles the globe-trotting integer's evolution, from its first appearance in Mesopotamia, five thousand years ago, in the form of two wedges pressed into a wet lump of clay, to 331 B.C., when the Greeks softened the rigid figure into a hollow circle, to around 630 A.D., in India, where zero was "more dot than circle." The most creative culture when it came to digit design seems to have been the Mayans, who depicted zero as a tattooed and necklaced man with his head thrown back.

Less fuss is made over the valueless number in Georges Ifrah's encyclopedic **The Universal History of Numbers** (Wiley), which bravely professes to provide "the full and complete answer to all and any questions that anyone might want to ask about the history of numbers and of counting." Crammed into this compendium of numeric esoterica are an illustrated guide to the Torres Straits islanders' body-counting system (the number 22 was indicated by the left foot's big toe, the sternum stood for 9) and examples of failed number systems, such as the Tamil and the Malayalam, each of whose growth was stunted at 1,000. Yet even Ifrah confirms zero's big-shot status as "the last major invention in the story of numbers."



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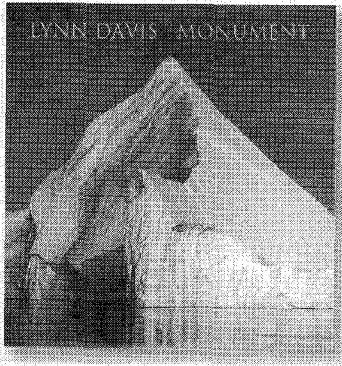

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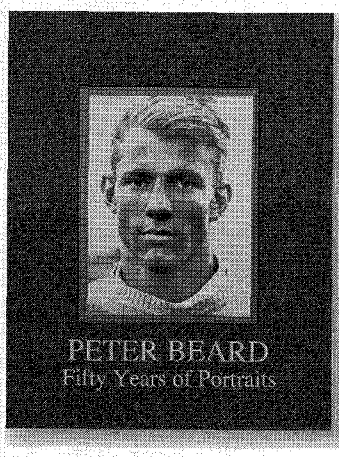

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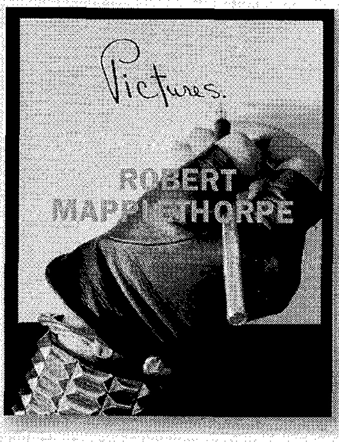

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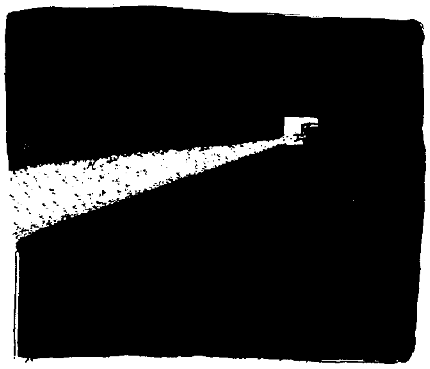

THE MOVIES

OPENING

Agnes Browne—Anjelica Houston plays the title character, a mother of seven living in Dublin in the late nineteen-sixties. When her husband's death plunges the family into debt, she finds a new life selling vegetables at a local market. Opening Dec. 3. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The End of the Affair—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 3.

Hell's Kitchen—Gloria's brother is killed in a botched drug deal, and she believes her boyfriend Johnny is responsible. After prison, Johnny returns to redeem himself. With Angelina Jolie and Mekhi Phifer; written and directed by Tony Cinciripini. Opening Dec. 3. (Criterion Center and Village East Cinemas.)

Holy Smoke—A young Australian woman (Kate Winslet) travels to India in search of a guru. With Harvey Keitel. Co-written and directed by Jane Campion. Opening Dec. 3. (Lincoln Square.)

A Map of the World—A rural town turns against newcomer Alice Goodwin (Sigourney Weaver) when a friend's daughter accidentally dies in her care. Directed by Scott Elliott. Opening Dec. 3. (Lincoln Square.)

Sweet and Lowdown—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 3. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

Wisconsin Death Trip—A portrait of life in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, circa 1890, based on Michael Lesy's 1973 book. Written and directed by James Marsh. Opening Dec. 1. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

All About My Mother—Pedro Almodóvar calls his new movie "a screwball drama," and it's only moderately entertaining. Manuela (Cecilia Roth), a reformed whore, loses her teen-age son in a car accident and goes in search of the boy's father, who knew nothing of his son's existence. She doesn't find him—at least not at first—but in Barcelona she falls in with an old friend, a transvestite prostitute (Antonia San Juan), and then with a great actress (Marisa Paredes) and her younger lover (Candela Peña), who are playing Blanche DuBois and Stella in a production of "A Streetcar Named Desire." The movie is a tribute to actresses who play actresses, but this specialized skill is also offered as a metaphor for women who, it is implied, can only create life in the shadow of men through deceit, manipulation, and role-playing. Almodóvar is trying for a new seriousness, but despite the presence of tempestuous actresses and transsexuals, the material doesn't have the giddiness he usually achieves. In Spanish.—*David Denby* (11/22/99) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Anywhere But Here—Wayne Wang, the director of "The Joy Luck Club," has made another picture that feels proudly bereft of men. A few of them get walk-on parts as dopes or turncoats, but most of the space is occupied by Adele August (Susan Sarandon) and her teen-age daughter, Ann (Natalie Portman). The two of them leave a settled life in Wisconsin and head for the riskier pleasures of Los Angeles, where the bulk of their relationship is consumed by arguments about their relationship; for a movie about escape, it seems dangerously trapped in its own predicament. Portman's portrait of grave and lovely bafflement, however, may be the best work she's done.—*Anthony Lane* (11/15/99) (Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.)

Bananas (1971)—The title refers to the chief cash crop of San Marcos, a fictional banana dictatorship, but it also signals the first time that Woody Allen went irresistibly bananas as a director and star. Written by Allen and Mickey Rose, it captures the late sixties/early seventies: sexual liberation and the self-consciousness accompanying it, quasi-paranoid political awareness, a collegiate culture that turned names like Kierkegaard into conversational gambits. Allen plays a college dropout, Fielding Mellish, a products tester who falls into an affair with a social activist (Louise Lasser). She's more fired up about a revolution in San Marcos than about Fielding. She's not ready "to give or to receive"; she feels "there's something missing." This anything-goes farce remains Allen's most uproarious movie.—*Michael Sragow* (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 1)

Being John Malkovich—An out-of-work puppeteer (John Cusack), his pet-loving girlfriend (Cameron Diaz), and a cynical office worker (Catherine Keener) take turns entering the head of the actor John Malkovich, where they remain for fifteen minutes at a time, experiencing everything he does, before being deposited with a whoosh beside the New Jersey Turnpike. This fantastic weightless comedy, which was written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, plays with notions of celebrity worship and gender reversal, but the best thing about it is the genially deadpan style of its most absurd inventions.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

Beyond the Clouds (1995)—Made four years ago, seen widely in Europe but glimpsed here only briefly at the New York Film Festival in 1996, Michelangelo Antonioni's mournful movie has at last been given an American release—quite a shift from his earlier career, when a film like "Blow-Up" could cause an international stir. Antonioni himself has probably changed less than the moviegoing audience; this latest work deals in much the same currency as before—baffling ruminations, foggy days, empty lives, and a helpless reverence for beautiful actresses. There are four connected stories here, set in Italy and France; all of them turn on the coupling and uncoupling of men and women, overseen by a brooding movie director (John Malkovich). Some of the characters are married; others are virtual strangers, which in the world of Antonioni amounts to the same thing. The whole enterprise is humorless and infuriating, and yet it gets to you; no one else could have summoned these twin images of arousal and graceful doom, or drawn such emotional dedication from so rich a cast—Sophie Marceau, Jean Reno, Fanny Ardant, Peter Weller, Jeanne Moreau, and the late Marcello Mastroianni, to name a few. This is the art movie to end all art movies; indeed, it feels like the end. In French, Italian, and German.—*A.L.* (The Screening Room; opening Dec. 1.)

Boys Don't Cry—In small-town Nebraska, a young woman named Teena Brandon (Hilary Swank) clips her hair into a butch cut, flattens her breasts, puts on boys' clothes and a boy's swagger, and passes in the world as Brandon Teena, handsome young dude. What she feels is pure exhilaration, the excitement of leaving her past behind and becoming a lover; what we feel is dismay and fear. Brandon falls in with a group of derelict, white-trash kids and attracts the languid beauty Lana (Chloë Sevigny), who allows herself to think that Brandon is a man—with inevitably disastrous results. The movie is a fine, terrifying tragic poem that is also, at times, subversively funny: the women who like Brandon seem to want the feminine as well as the masculine in a lover. Directed by Kimberly Peirce, and written by Peirce and Andy Bienen. Based on actual events, which were the subject last year of a documentary called "The Brandon Teena Story."—*D.D.* (10/18-25/99) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

Dazed and Confused (1993)—Richard Linklater's relaxed, uplifting follow-up to "Slacker." It's the last day of school, summer 1976, and a bunch of seniors are pondering their futures and getting ready to thrash their juniors. We learn of Pink (Jason London), for instance, who wants to play college football and smoke pot. But the movie has no particular hero or heroine; Linklater is too democratic for that, and his camera glides

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American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
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New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
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Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
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When I see blood, I become a bull.
—Marvin Hagler

I have no difficulty justifying boxing as a sport because I have never thought of it as a sport.

There is nothing fundamentally playful about it; nothing that seems to belong to daylight, to pleasure. At its moments of greatest intensity it seems to contain so complete and so powerful an image of life—life's beauty, vulnerability, despair, incalculable and often self-destructive courage—that boxing *is* life, and hardly a mere game. During a superior boxing match (Ali-Frazier I, for instance) we are deeply moved by the body's dialogue with its shadow-self—or Death. Baseball, football, basketball—these quintessentially American pastimes are recognizably sports because they involve play: they are games. One *plays* football, one doesn't *play* boxing.

Observing team sports, teams of adult men, one sees how men are children in the most felicitous sense of the word. But boxing in its elemental ferocity cannot be assimilated into childhood. (Though very young men box, even professionally, and many world champions began boxing in their early or mid-teens. By the time he was sixteen, Jack Dempsey, rootless and adrift in the West, was fighting for small sums of money in unrefereed saloon fights in which—in the natural course of things—he might have been killed.)

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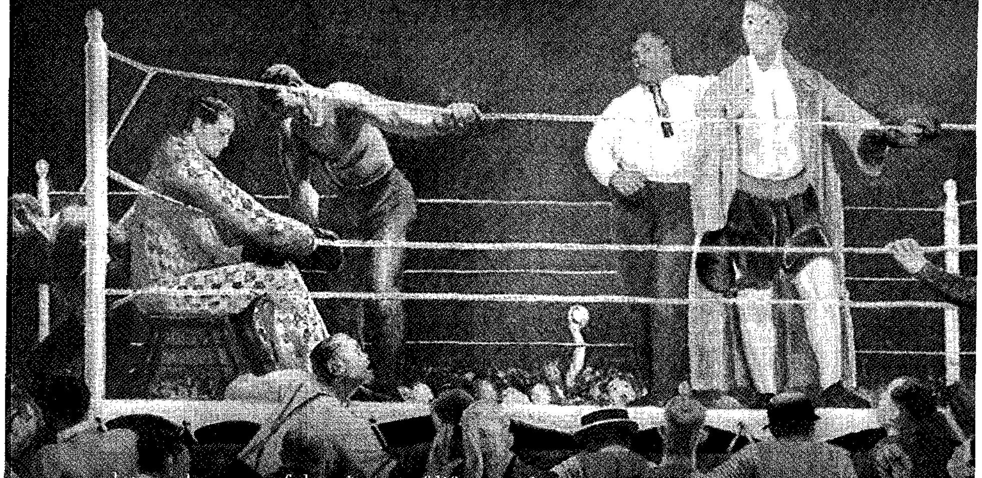
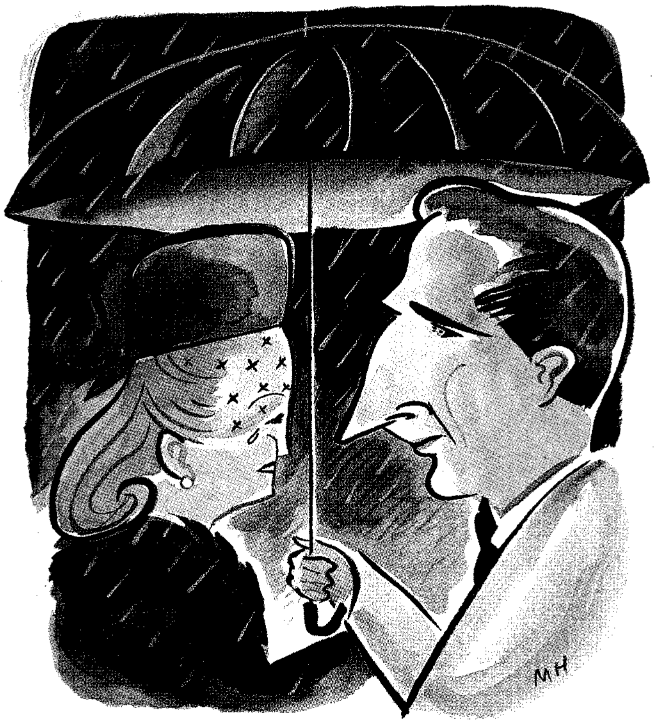


around offering moments of heroism, or bliss, to all the characters in turn.—*A.L.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Dec. 5)

Dogma—Kevin Smith, lord of the zero budget ("Clerks," "Chasing Amy"), has decided to stretch himself with this sprawling, star-stuffed fantasy on the trifling theme of good and evil. His unlikely plot features Matt Damon and Ben Affleck as a couple of renegade angels who spot a chance to reënter heaven and thus terminate the universe. Up against them is a rank of supernatural forces—played by Alan Rickman, Chris Rock, Jason Lee, and Selma Hayek—a perplexed earthling (Linda Fiorentino), and a couple of unwitting prophets, played by the grungy Jason Mewes and the bearded Smith himself, back by popular demand from his previous pictures. The result has some great lines, but it's a muddle that turns into a mess; there have been cries of distress about the film's attack on organized religion, but no self-respecting church could seriously claim to be damaged by this extended skit. With Alanis Morissette as God.—*A.L.* (11/15/99) (Art Greenwich Twin, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

The Insider—A self-important but juicily entertaining public-affairs melodrama about big-time journalism and corporate villainy. Russell Crowe plays the real-life whistle-blower Jeffrey Wigand, who in 1995 had devastating things to reveal about his former employer, tobacco giant Brown & Williamson, and Al Pacino is the bristling "60 Minutes" producer Lowell Bergman, who was stymied in bringing Wigand's information to the public. They are meant to represent two kinds of personal honor arrayed against corporate game-players, including Michael Gambon as a tobacco executive and Christopher Plummer as a mildly satirized Mike Wallace. Director Michael Mann creates a rising line of tension and paranoia which leads to a muted, not entirely reassuring ending.—*D.D.* (11/8/99) (Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)



Opening Dec. 3, Neil Jordan's "The End of the Affair."

MARCELLUS HALL

Liberty Heights—The new Barry Levinson movie is set in Baltimore, and that alone should raise the hopes of his fans. As in "Diner" (still his finest hour), Levinson orchestrates events, and rueful nonevents, with the relaxed air of a man who is completely sure of the ground beneath his feet. The time is the fall of 1954, the place is the working-class Jewish neighborhood, and all is not well in the Kurtzman family: young Ben (Ben Foster) is falling for the radiant Sylvia (Rebekah Johnson), a black girl in his class. To Ben's mother (Bebe Neuwirth), this is a personal insult, although his father (Joe Mantegna) is too busy running a numbers racket out of his burlesque theatre to take much notice. At the same time, their older son, Van (Adrien Brody), is pursuing an icy Wasp goddess (Carolyn Murphy) with gratifying success. This sneaky breaching of cultural and ethnic frontiers is Levinson's favorite theme; he finds comic alliances where other directors would sniff for confrontation, and he skillfully avoids the traps of sentimental softness. If the picture has a lesson to impart, it is that, for postwar believers, only one religion was solemn enough to be beyond a joke, and that was the cult of Frank Sinatra.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

Mansfield Park—It's Jane Austen, but not as we know it. Aware, perhaps, that this is one of the sterner and less loved of the novels, the director and screenwriter Patricia Rozema has taken shameless liberties and encouraged her actors to do the same. The plot is simplified but intact: impoverished Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) is brought to live with her wealthier relations, among them Sir Thomas Bertram (Harold Pinter) and his son Edmund (Jonny Lee Miller). Their lives are churned up by the arrival of the dashing Crawfords—Henry (Alessandro Nivola) and Mary (Embeth Davidtz), both of whom have various designs upon Fanny. Everyone in this movie seems to fancy everyone else: how very different from the home life of the late Miss Austen. We even get a bouncy nude scene and lots of filthy secrets about slave trading. Yet the picture, however willful, has a welcome audacity and a hard, discomforting look that dispels the plushness of ordinary costume drama. Best of all, Rozema's version of Fanny, tricked out with elements from Austen's own letters, is more of a sport than the original.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc—Brutal mace-swinging battle scenes, Help-I'm-having-a-vision digital effects, and histrionic and embarrassing performances give this enterprise classic bad-movie status. Director Luc Besson, working again with his wife, Milla Jovovich (they teamed for the equally excessive "The Fifth Element"), has no problem achieving some startling visual moments, but his rapid editing style quickly dulls the senses (he makes Oliver Stone's rat-a-tat cutting look positively geriatric). Any discussion about whether Joan was a messenger of God or a madwoman who really knew how to rally a crowd is trampled by the ranting-and-raving screenplay. The movie hits its height of absurdity when Jovovich, in prison, has a vision of Dustin Hoffman (billed in the credits as "The Conscience"), which leads her, understandably, to question her sanity.—*B.D.* (Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

Pokémon: The First Movie—Nintendo's hugely popular pocket-monster game (the object is to capture and train for combat a hundred and fifty-one characters with different powers and personalities) has been turned into a highly effective and very entertaining kiddie flick. The plot has a boy named Ash trying to prevent the cloning of a Pokémon and save his faithful companion, Pikachu. There's more to the storytelling than that, though, since the Pokémon world is far more baroque than you'd expect from such a cartoon phenomenon. It aims for an almost mythological fantasyland with a depth that such earlier kiddie blockbusters as the Power Rangers and the Ninja Turtles never aspired to. All marketing issues aside (and there are many), the animation itself is a lot finer than you'd expect from such a blatant cash-cow enterprise.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

Princess Mononoke—This handsome, beautifully designed Japanese animated film has the size—though not the clarity—of a great Japanese film epic. The plot is more complicated than that of "The Ring of the Niebelungen," and it's impossible, at times, to tell who's fighting on whose side, and why. Minnie Driver, Billy Crudup, Billy Bob Thornton, Gillian Anderson, and Claire Danes provide the voices. Hayao Miyazaki is the director.—*D.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.)

Ride with the Devil—Ang Lee has become one of the most solid and stately of directors, but it's hard to predict where he'll turn next. After "Sense and Sensibility" and the East Coast neuroses of "The Ice Storm," he has shifted his attention to the Kansas-Missouri border during the Civil War. Two young friends (Skeet Ulrich and Tobey Maguire) are caught up in the rough edges of the conflict; instead of grand campaigns, we get woodland skirmishes and deceitful ambushes, and an uneasy sense that the moral advantage is constantly changing hands. Confronted for the first time with action scenes, Lee acquits himself honorably, and his uncanny feel for the moodiness of landscape remains undimmed; the slow domestication of the movie, with the values of home restored, is nicely handled, and yet it seems like a letdown after the awkward perils that prevailed before. The cast is also a touch underpowered; this is a film about young men in deep trouble, but they look more blanked out than coarsened by their plight. With Jeffrey Wright as a trusty servant and Jewel, the pop star, making a fine début as a lusty widow. Thankfully, she waits until the credits before bursting into song.—*A.L.* (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

Sleepy Hollow—For a good part of Tim Burton's retelling of Washington Irving's old tale we seem to be watching the same magnificent shots of a headless horseman riding a black steed through the darkened woods. The enraged demon rears up, with billowing cape, and then advances at a gallop onto a terrified victim and swings his blade: more heads roll in this two-hour film than in the Place de la Concorde throughout the entire Reign of Terror. Burton's work is impressively sinister—the light is invariably a sombre, chill gray; foul mists, like a spreading poison, envelop the streets and houses. But, like any stylized look that lacks sufficient human interest, the atmosphere of "Sleepy Hollow" grows monotonous. Johnny Depp is charming but weightless as Ichabod Crane, rationalist seeker of truth. The other characters—men with pale, pinched faces in frock coats and wigs, women in Empire-style gowns with corseted breasts—make

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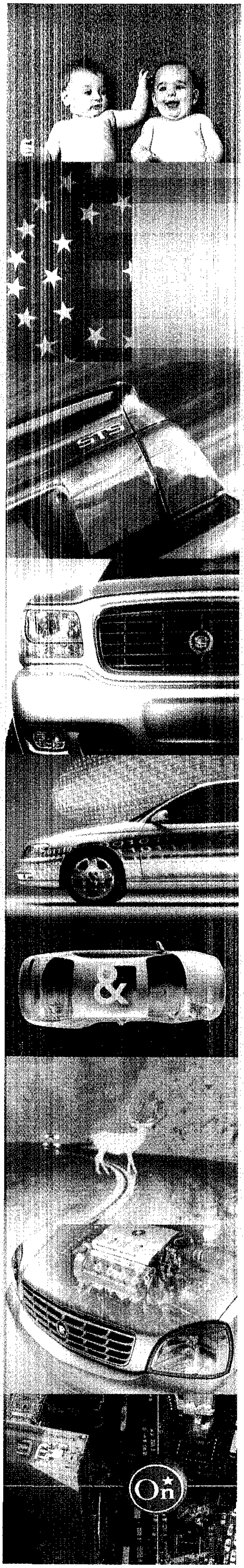

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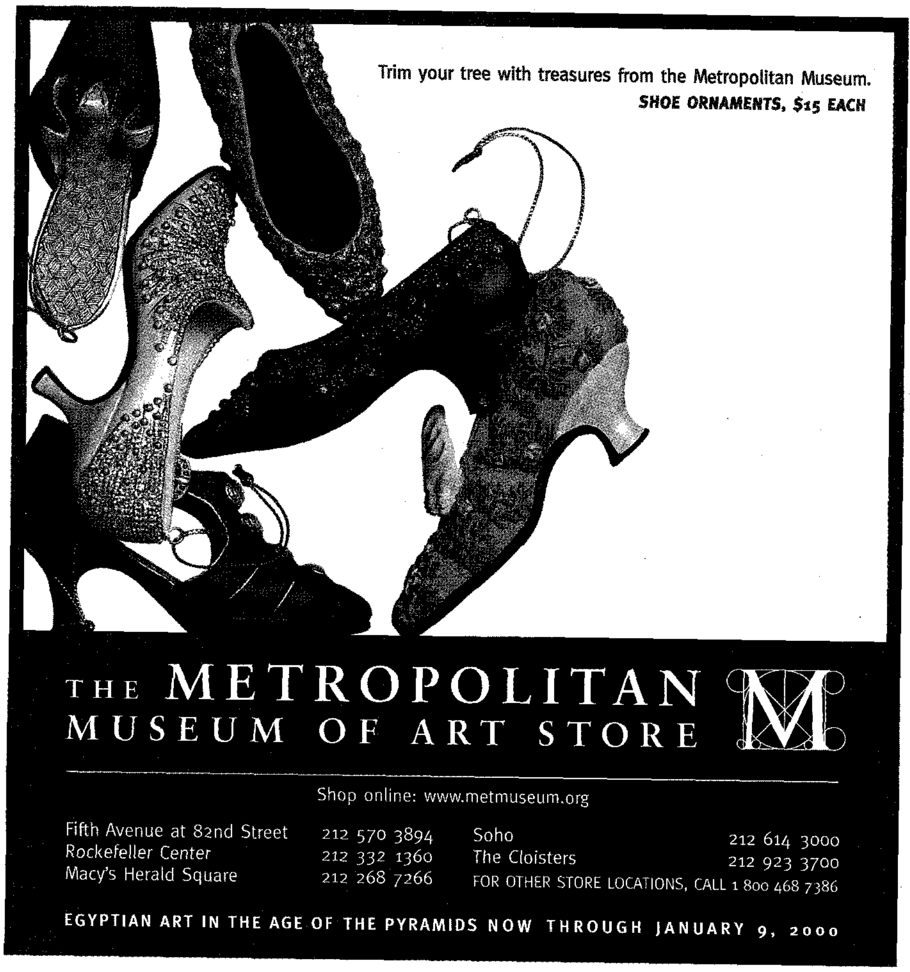
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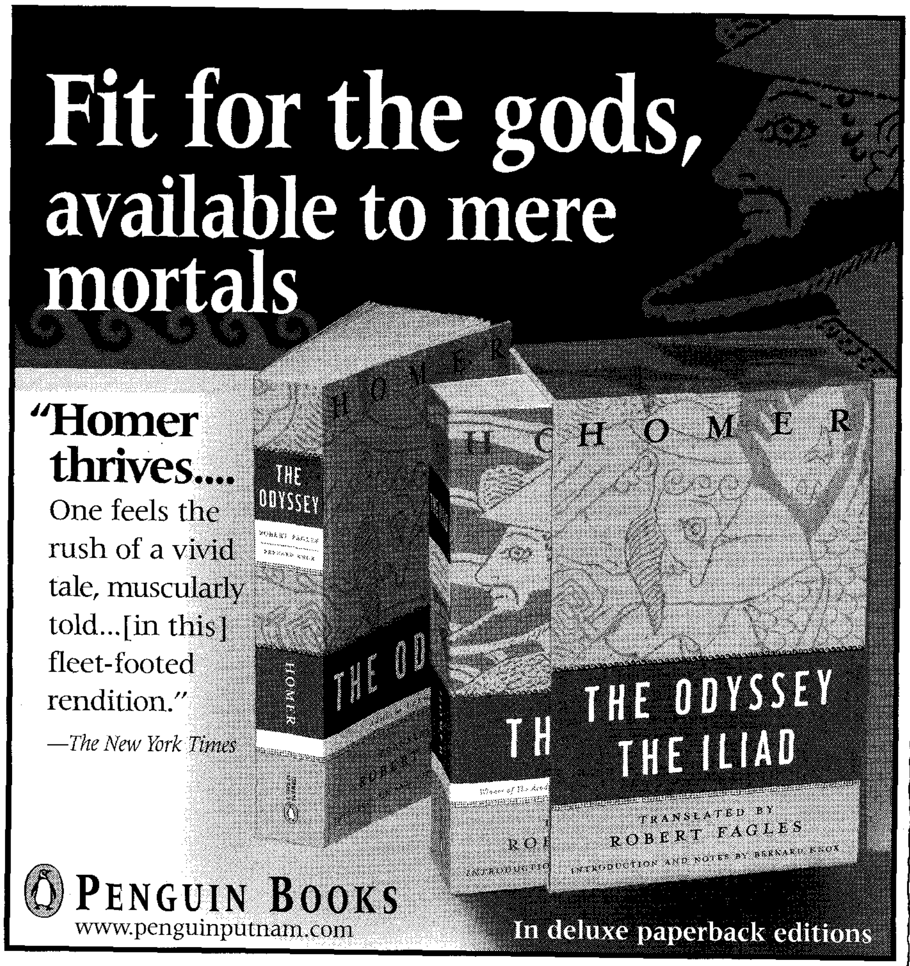
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stunning first impressions, but then they start talking gibberish and we lose interest. With Miranda Richardson, Michael Gambon, and Christina Ricci. Cinematography by Emmanuel Lubezki.—*D.D.* (11/22/99) (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

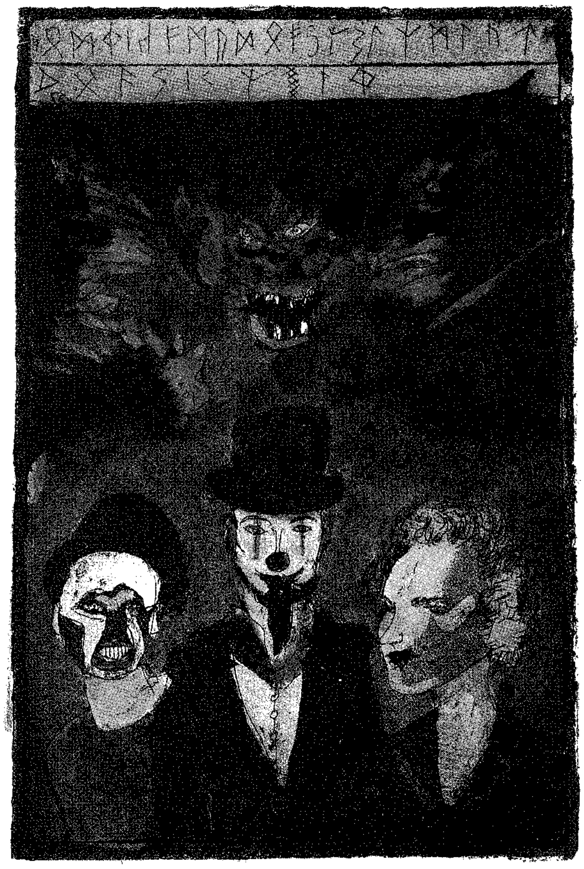
SEVENTEEN (1984)—Working with lightweight camera rigs they developed themselves, Jeff Kreines and Joel DeMott (who, despite the name, is female) approach the subjects of their documentary—working-class teenagers in Muncie, Indiana—man-to-man and woman-to-woman. The immediacy is refreshing, and shocking. As searing as it is rambunctious, this film brings out all the middle-class prejudices against the working class that American movies rarely confront. But it focusses on what's important to the kids—the flirtation and double-daring and risk-taking that extend from school hallways to the streets, the partying that takes place when the parents aren't home, and even the rowdy get-togethers that include parents. The white girls lead relatively elastic lives (they even go out with black boys); the white boys are hell-raising mini-machos.—*M.S.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Dec. 4.)

THE STRAIGHT STORY—By way of a comic coda to the violent "Lost Highway," David Lynch has confounded all expectations and come up with a movie about a lawnmower. The model in question, a gas-guzzling 1966 John Deere, is ridden by the elderly Alvin Straight (who was a real person, but it's a perfect Lynch name) all the way from Laurens, Iowa, to Mt. Zion, Wisconsin, on a mission of mercy to his brother, Lyle. The result is a perplexing blend of the ornery and the ornate; Richard Farnsworth plays Alvin as a stubbornly decent sort, while Lynch riddles his journey with bursts of calculated strangeness—including a house ablaze by the side of the road, attended by firemen who might have stepped out of "Blue Velvet."—*A.L.* (11/1/99) (American Museum of the Moving Image, Eastside Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH—The British director Michael Apted has made "Gorillas in the Mist," "Coal Miner's Daughter," and the acclaimed documentary series that began with "7 Up." No wonder the producers picked him for the new James Bond project; next time they hope to get Werner Herzog or the Farrelly Brothers. You can just about spot the Apted style in the midst of the mayhem, but you have to look carefully; there are only so many ways in which a director can fiddle with the Bond formula. Once again, 007 (Pierce Brosnan) is called upon to save the world's natural resources; environmental viewers everywhere will applaud his efforts to save a Turkish oil pipeline. With him is Dr. Christmas Jones (Denise Richards), who is big in warheads; against him is an unstable skinhead called Renard (Robert Carlyle); underneath him is Elektra King (Sophie Marceau), a shady billionairess. Much of the movie is airless and oddly muddled; the opening quarter of an hour, however, which surges into a London boat chase, provides as much fun as you can legally have in a public place.—*A.L.* (11/29/99) (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly.)

ALSO PLAYING

AMERICAN BEAUTY (9/20/99): BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatres, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **AMERICAN MOVIE:** Film Forum. . . . **THE BACHELOR:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, and Orpheum VII. . . . **THE BEST MAN:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, and Union Square. . . . **THE BONE COLLECTOR:** Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street



At Film Forum, "Curse of the Demon."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **THE BRANDON TEENA STORY:** The Screening Room. . . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE CITY:** Quad Cinema. . . . **DOUBLE JEOPARDY:** 64th and 2nd and State. . . . **END OF DAYS:** Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia, Orpheum VII, Union Square, Waverly, and Ziegfeld. . . . **FELICIA'S JOURNEY:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **FIGHT CLUB** (10/18-25/99): Criterion Center and Union Square. . . . **FLAWLESS:** Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **42 UP:** Cinema Village. . . . **HOME PAGE:** Cinema Village. . . . **LAST NIGHT:** Cinema Village. . . . **LIGHT IT UP:** Criterion Center and Union Square. . . . **THE LIMEY** (10/11/99): Angelika Film Center and Cinema 3rd Avenue. . . . **LOLA AND BILLY THE KID:** Quad Cinema. . . . **A MOMENT OF INNOCENCE:** Cinema Village. . . . **MUSIC OF THE HEART:** 84th Street Sixplex, Gotham Cinema, and State. . . . **ROSETTA** (11/8/99): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **TOY STORY 2:** Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **2 BY 4:** Quad Cinema. . . . **TUMBLEWEEDS:** Union Square.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Dec. 9: "*The New Yorker* Goes to the Movies." A series of films connected to or inspired by *The New Yorker.* Dec. 1 at 1, 6, and 9:45: "Million Dollar Legs" (1932, Edward Cline). . . . Dec. 1 at 3 and 7:45: "Bananas" (†). . . . Dec. 2 at 1 and 6: "Last Tango in Paris" (1972, Bernardo Bertolucci; in French and English). . . . Dec. 2 at 3:30 and 8:30 and Dec. 7 at 8:15: "L.A. Story" (1991, Mick Jackson). . . . Dec. 3 at 1, 6, and 10: "Trade Winds" (1938, Tay Garnett). . . . Dec. 3 at 3 and 8: "Midnight" (1965, Mitchell Leisen) . . . . Dec. 4 at 4:30 and 8:45: "Meet Me in St. Louis" (1944, Vincente Minnelli). . . . Dec. 4 at 6:45: "My Sister Eileen" (1955, Richard Quine). . . . Dec. 5 at 4:30 and 9: "The Left-Handed Woman" (1977, Peter Handke; in German). . . . Dec. 5 at 7: "Cries and Whispers" (1972, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). . . . Dec. 7 at 1 and 6: "The Man Who Came to Dinner" (1941, William Keighley). . . . Dec. 7 at 3:15 and 10:15: "The Male Animal" (1942, Elliot Nugent).

FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films celebrating Columbia Pictures' seventy-fifth anniversary. Dec 1: "Nightfall" (1954, Jacques Tourneur) and "Curse of the Demon" (1958, Tourneur). . . . Dec. 2: "The Line-Up" (1958, Don Siegel) and "The Sniper" (1952, Edward Dymtryk). . . . Dec. 3-4: "The Wild One" (1953, Laslo Benedek) and "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper). . . . Dec. 5: "Fail-Safe" (1964, Sidney Lumet) and "The Bedford Incident" (1965, James B. Harris). . . . Dec. 6: "The Talk of the Town" (1942, George Stevens) and "The More the Merrier" (1943, Stevens). . . . Dec. 7: "Angels Over Broadway" (1940, Ben Hecht and Lee Garmes) and "No Greater Glory" (1934, Frank Bozarge).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A retrospective of films made with 8-mm. technology. Dec. 2 at 6: "Big as Life 1999: Moving Out". . . . ¶ Through Dec. 19: A program of films representing recent work from the independent states of the former Soviet Union. . . . ¶ A program of silent films, 1893 to 1928, from the museum's collection. Dec. 2 at 2:30 and Dec. 4 at 5: "Dream Street" (1921, D. W. Griffith). . . . Dec. 2 at 3: "The Origins of American Animation" (1900-21). . . . Dec. 3 at 2:30: "The Three Musketeers" (1921, Fred Niblo). . . . Dec. 4 at 2: "Hoodoo Ann" (1916, Lloyd Ingraham). . . . Dec. 5 at 5 and Dec. 6 at 3: "The Wrath of the Gods" (1914, Reginald Barker). . . . Dec. 7 at 3: "I Was Born, But . . ." (1932, Yasujiro Ozu).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Jan. 30: "Andy's Funhouse: The Andy Kaufman Special" (1979). (Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 1, Thursdays at 7, Fridays at 6, and Saturdays and Sundays at 1.)

BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Dec. 1: "Vanya on 42nd Street" (1994, Louis Malle). . . . Dec. 2: "Ulysses' Gaze" (1995, Theo Angelopoulos). . . . Dec. 3: "Nô" (1998, Robert LePage). . . . Dec. 4: "Marked Woman" (1937, Lloyd Bacon). . . . Dec. 5: "Dark Victory" (1939, William Dieterle). . . . Dec. 6: "It Happened One Night" (1934, Frank Capra). . . . Dec. 7: "Fellini's Casanova" (1976, Federico Fellini; in Italian).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program called "Restless and Rebellious: Teen Movies Then and Now." Dec. 4 at 2: "Seventeen" (†). . . . Dec. 4 at 4:30: "Edge City" (1998, Eugene Martin). . . . Dec. 5 at 2: "Election" (1999, Alexander Payne). . . . Dec. 5 at 4:30: "Dazed and Confused" (†).

THE SCREENING ROOM, 54 Varick St. (334-2100)—From Dec. 1: "Beyond the Clouds" (†).

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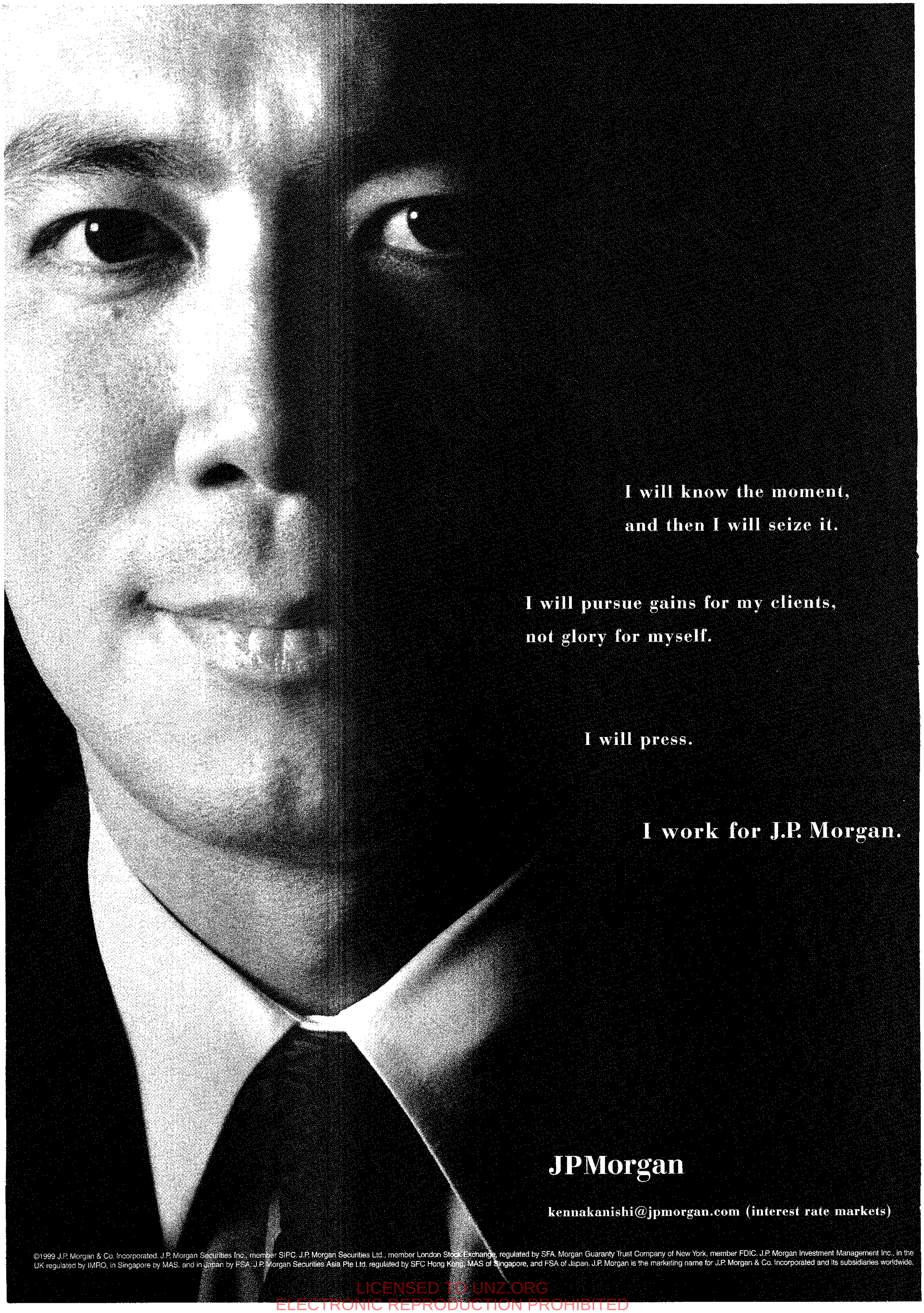
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THE NEW YORKER

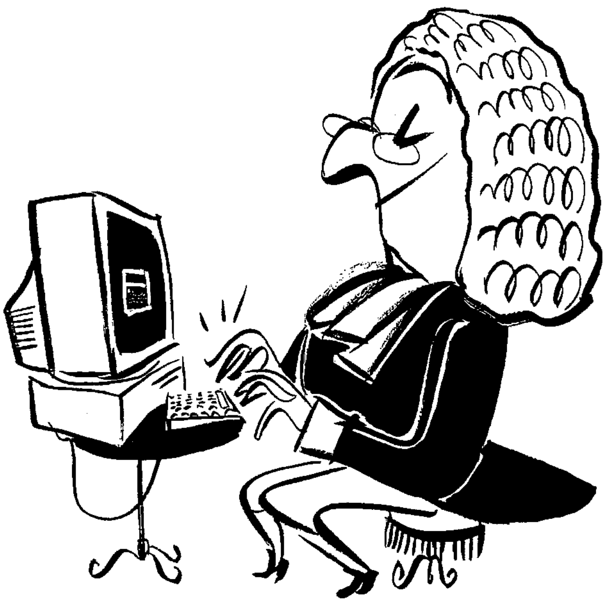
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

The return of the word.

ONE of the things that everyone agreed on, up until about ten minutes ago, was that we had left Gutenberg and his galaxy far behind—that the old world of the linear page, the world of sentences and print, had vanished, and we had entered a new world, where the spectacle, the visual image, the wraparound sensual embrace ruled. The word and all its sad little servants—the scrivener, the occasional poet, the pamphleteer, the sentimental essayist, the hack—were gone, and the virtual-reality men, with their funny gloves and goggles, were upon us. The logic that pointed to the death of writing and reading was compelling. Each new medium was more visually and sensually rich than the last: movies gave way to talking movies, which gave way to color talking movies, which gave way to round-the-clock talking color television. In that context, words just hung around looking glum, with hardly enough energy left to compose themselves into sentences.

Yet the one honest-to-God revolution that has taken over the world in the past ten years has been the coming of the Internet and the World Wide Web—and, beyond anything else, this revolution marks the return of the (virtual) ink-stained wretch and his old pal the Constant Reader. The Internet is the first new medium to move decisively backward, for it is, essentially, written. When someone tells you that he has been on line, what he has probably been doing is reading words that other people have written, and then writing some words of his own. Even the gawk sites tend to be surrounded, like old erotic prints, by a border of words. (The Internet is, for now, about as sexually impoverished as any medium could be; there is something methodical about the way it builds an image of, say, Denise Richards in a thong line by line, as though a twelve-year-old were describing her in the boys' room.)



E-mail, meanwhile, is the literary event of the late century. Ten years ago, even the most literate of us wrote maybe half a dozen letters a year; the rest of our lives took place on the telephone. And each new collection of letters (Virginia Woolf's, Henry James's) was reviewed with the lament that there would be no more like it. Yet it now seems a good bet that in two hundred years people will be reading someone's collected E-mail the way we read Edmund Wilson's letters or Pepys's diaries. There cannot be ten people in America who have had their lives changed by virtual reality, or who have been hyper-linked into a new consciousness—but multitudes have found a nearly forgotten friendship suddenly made intimate again, because of E-mail, and are attentive once more to their sentences. We have become a nation not of Philip K. Dicks but of Horace Walpoles.

The reason this medium has blossomed is not that it gives you *more* immediacy; blessedly, it gives you *less*. The new appeal of E-mail is the old appeal of print. It isn't instant; it isn't immediate; it isn't in your face. Written language gives you a hat and a Groucho nose and glasses; it's you there, but not quite you. E-mail has succeeded brilliantly for the same reason that the videophone failed miserably: what we actually want from our exchanges is the minimum human contact commensurate with the need to connect with other people. "Only connect." Yes, but *only* connect.

Those who stubbornly insist that the Internet is forward-looking point out that it's good only for a certain kind of writing—the three-hundred-word burst, the quick hit. But this confirms how sublimely reactionary it is. It doesn't just look back—it looks way back, to around 1730. Swift and Pope and Lord Chesterfield, with a Web page apiece, would have been merrily scribbling short essays, anonymous accusations, flames, and billets-doux. Dr. Johnson would have loved the medium and Boswell would have fancied it so much that he might yet spring back to life for a chance to log on. Imagine his links: half pornographic ("Some of my favorite hot harlot sites are . . ."), half sententious ("Great Christian advice can be

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

found at . . ."). Two of the most popular Web forms—the rant and the quote page, a miscellany of epigrams—are pure eighteenth-century revivals. On-line life is, in the end, a life of aphorisms and bons mots, unhinged attacks and quick compliments. That the triumph of numbers—that is, the digital age—should lead to the return of letters is as happy an irony as will warm this cold millennium. Just don't sneeze on your virtual snuff. —ADAM GOPNIK

WALL STREET FOLLIES

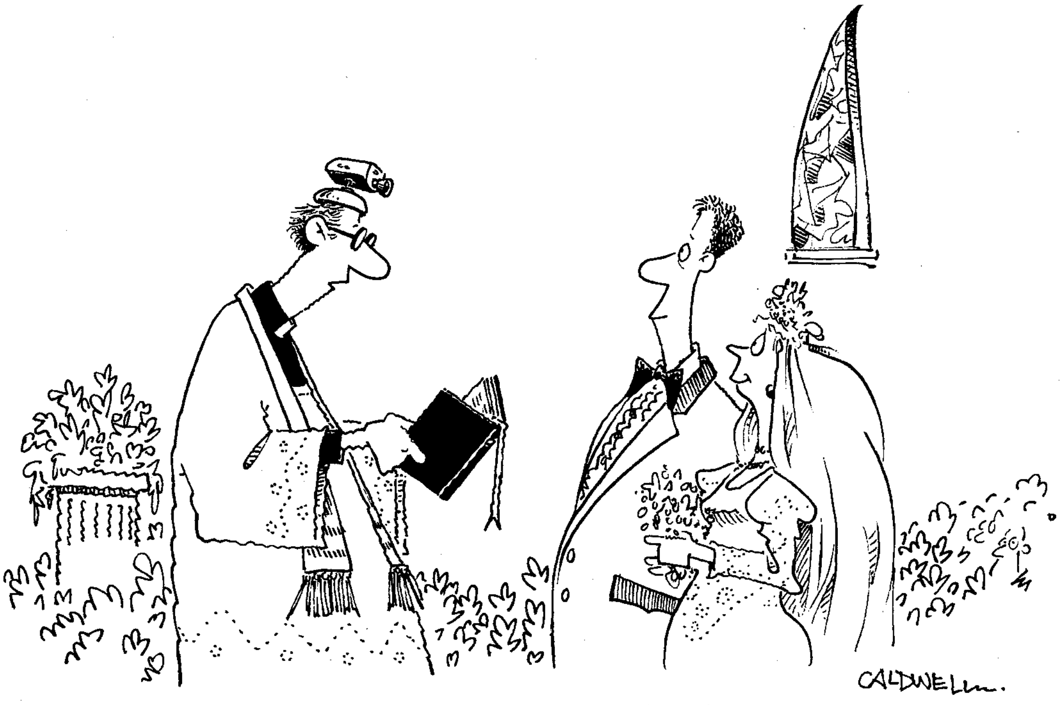
The death business gets wired.

For a mortician with an early winter cold, Xavier (Sonny) Metichecchia sounded downright giddy the other day, spinning his dreams for the dot-com future. As a young intern in the old, bricks-and-mortar funeral business, Mr. Metichecchia helped to embalm the corpse of Duke Ellington, among other delicate tasks. Now, at the age of forty-five, he is president of HeavenlyDoor.com, one of several "death services" portal sites flourishing on the World Wide Web. HeavenlyDoor promises to put the cyber-bereaved in touch with funeral homes in specific Zip Codes, to post personalized obituaries, and even, in the near future, to facilitate visits to virtual graves. "Our dream would be to have digital pictures of the graves of deceased loved ones," Mr. Metichecchia said, in tactfully excited tones. "The family can supply a memorial text. Then, during different points in the year, they can log on from time to time and perhaps say a prayer."

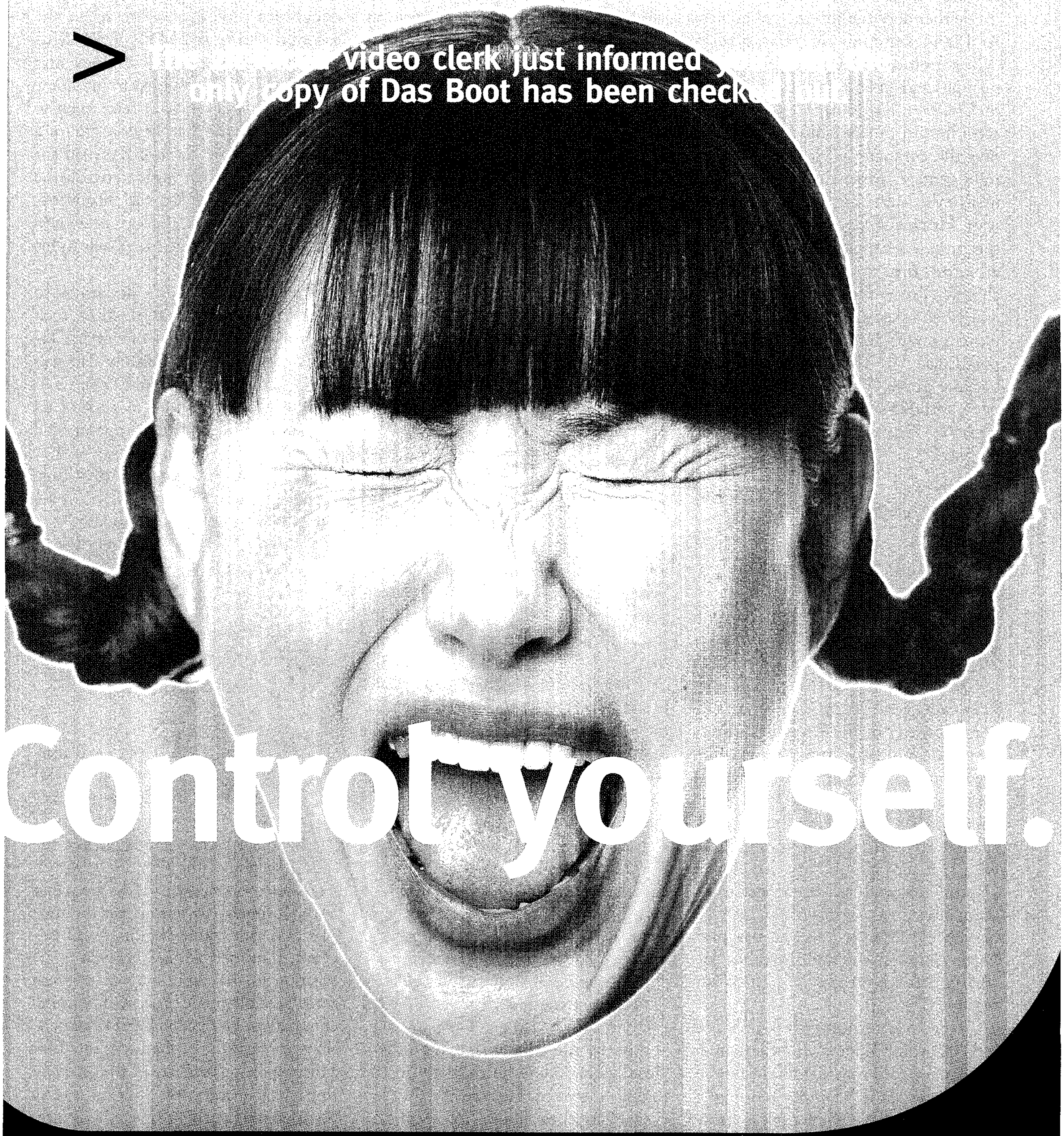
HeavenlyDoor.com has been up since May, but the E-commerce competition among undertakers is already fierce. It is possible to browse on line for biodegradable caskets (green-burial.co.uk), or reserve an "Olympus Urn" for your oversized pet (two hundred and eighty-five dollars at petcemetery.org). WebCaskets.com offers steep discounts on coffins in eighteen designer styles, including "Fairway to Heaven," painted with an elaborate golfing motif. Treegivers.com can arrange memorial tree plantings, and Ocean Scatterings (nemarine.com/oceanscatter.htm) advertises ceremonial scatterings of ashes ("performed respectfully by a Coast Guard Licensed Captain") off the coast of Massachusetts. "Baby boomers are not stuck in the traditions of former generations around this issue," Stuart Miller, president and C.E.O. of a site called Plan4ever.com, said. Mr. Miller's site features tie-ins with florists, an on-line bereavement counsellor, even virtual "celebrity gardens," where mourners can leave testimonials to an odd potpourri of prominent dead people, such as the recently deceased TV film critic Gene Siskel, or Malcolm X.

Plan4ever.com went up on April Fools' Day. It is owned by a company called Bold New World, which has reserved key death-related search-engine words ("funeral," "obituary") with Yahoo and A.O.L., and recently purchased discounturns.com, "one of the largest providers of funeral urns over the Internet," according to Mr. Miller. Mr. Miller, who is thirty-four, has a background in public relations and marketing. He owns equity in the company, sprinkles his conversation with Web-savvy terms like "launch" and "niche," and even hints at interest from the big venture-capital firms in Silicon Valley. Web surfers can write up their wills on Plan4ever (Mr. Miller has), prearrange their funerals, and even ponder tombstone styles to the audio-streamed organ strains of "Ave Maria." "We'll have caskets up in about a week," Mr. Miller said, in his bright, pitchman's voice. "We'll be able to send you a casket anywhere in the U.S. within twenty-four hours."

If Sonny Metichecchia is fazed by these breakthroughs, he's not letting on. A virtual military veteran's "wall of honor" page was in the works at Heaven's Door (the corporate name of HeavenlyDoor.com), and the Manhattan-based technical staff was busy refurbishing the site as he spoke. "We have the Webmasters, the M.I.T. brainiacs," Mr. Metichecchia said, "and they are very good at what they do." He is a third-generation undertaker, and a graduate of the venerable American Academy McAllister Institute of Funeral Service, in Manhattan. Before going digital, he spent years running funeral parlors in the New York area. (Duke Ellington was embalmed at the Walter B. Cooke Funeral Home, in Manhattan.) "I was ready for a change," he said. "It's a tough business. It's



"If there is anyone who objects to this union, either here or on the Internet, speak now or forever hold your peace."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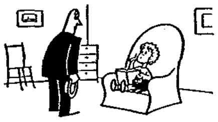
Neither does the Internet, of course. At Plan4ever.com, the charge for a cyber memorial, with digital photographs and an on-line guestbook, runs to $59.95—"a one-time fee, forever," according to Stuart Miller. Mr. Miller says the company is "looking for the right strategic partner to take us to the next level," but, for now, profits can wait. HeavenlyDoor, meanwhile, is in the process of merging with Procept, a biotech firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Procept trades on the Nasdaq, and when asked if HeavenlyDoor employees might receive stock in the proposed deal Mr. Metichecchia suddenly became grave. "We're a service company, and that's not what we're in business for," he said. "But it wouldn't be too bad."

—Adam Platt

CAMPAIGN TRAIL

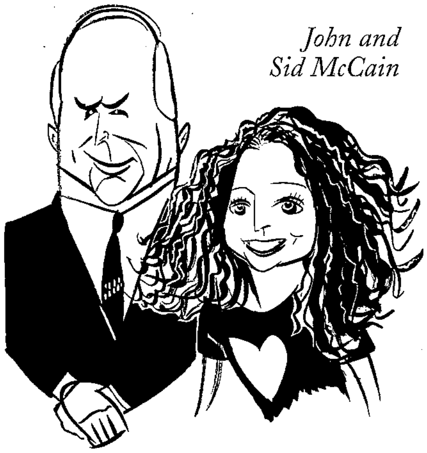
John McCain, rock-and-roll dad.



Karenna Gore Schiff may have good connections on the Upper East Side, but Sid McCain, the first-born daughter of the Republican Presidential candidate from Arizona, has the phone numbers for Pink Floyd and Puff Daddy. In recent weeks, while John McCain has been defending himself against accusations of ill temper, Sid, who is a senior publicity director at Capitol Records, has been overseeing the winter press campaign for the rock band Megadeth. "If I ever have to have Secret Service," she said the other day, "they'd better be ready for a lot of late nights."

Over an afternoon glass of wine, Sid—short for Sidney, her father's middle name—said that she found the interest in her father's temper amusing. "I knew that it would come back to haunt him," she said, lighting a cigarette she hoped would not be noted (cigarettes rate slightly below campaign-finance abuses on her father's hit list). "We've all experienced his 'quick' temper," she continued. "He'll snap at you, but it never lasts more than a minute. And he's much better than he used to be. Now he softens it with humor. When I was a kid, it would be 'Damn it, if I have to tell you to sweep that driveway one more time!' "

Sid McCain was thirteen months old in 1967, when her father's plane was shot down in Vietnam, where he spent the next five and a half years as a prisoner of war. "I didn't have anything to miss," she said. "Everybody took pity on me. I got to meet the Washington Redskins. We didn't know he was being tortured every day and eating pumpkin soup. When I get really pissed off at him now, I try to think about that."



John and Sid McCain

After he came home, McCain established a strict parenting style. "He took the role of the father very seriously," Sid said. "But when we finished chores, we'd go to the beach and swim. He'd pretend he was Banana Man and throw me into the waves. We had bodysurfing contests."

Sid's parents divorced when she was thirteen years old. John McCain embarked on a career as a conservative politician; Sid became a textbook rebellious teen. "I was punk-rock girl," she said. "I dyed my hair purple. I wore a slip as a skirt. I was vegan, too. Good thing he didn't see me much then, 'cause I looked pretty sick."

Lately, the McCains have grown close again. "Now he calls me in the middle of the day. He'll be like, 'Just left New Hampshire, honey. You see me on the "Today" show?' "

This particular week, while McCain *père* was addressing the temperament issue, McCain *fille* was tackling similar difficulties with Megadeth. "The new record is selling really well," she explained, smoothing a crease in her skirt. "But people just aren't excited to say the word 'Megadeth' on the radio." John McCain recently got a taste of his daughter's professional life when she escorted him to the MTV Video Music Awards. "We saw Kid Rock and Run DMC. MTV wanted to interview him—how cool would it have been to say 'Here's Dad!'—but he was late for a fund-raiser." The Senator returned for an interview at the music network the other day. He avoided the boxers-or-briefs issue, but he did say he would consider inviting Nine Inch Nails to his inaugural.

Could Sid McCain's proximity to the sex-and-drug-filled world of rock and roll be exploited by one of her father's opponents? "When my dad was on the short list to be Bob Dole's Vice-President, I had to send in a list of all the artists and record companies I'd worked with," she said. "I knew they might be concerned by the Puffy thing. But I guess I came out O.K., or he wouldn't be running for President."

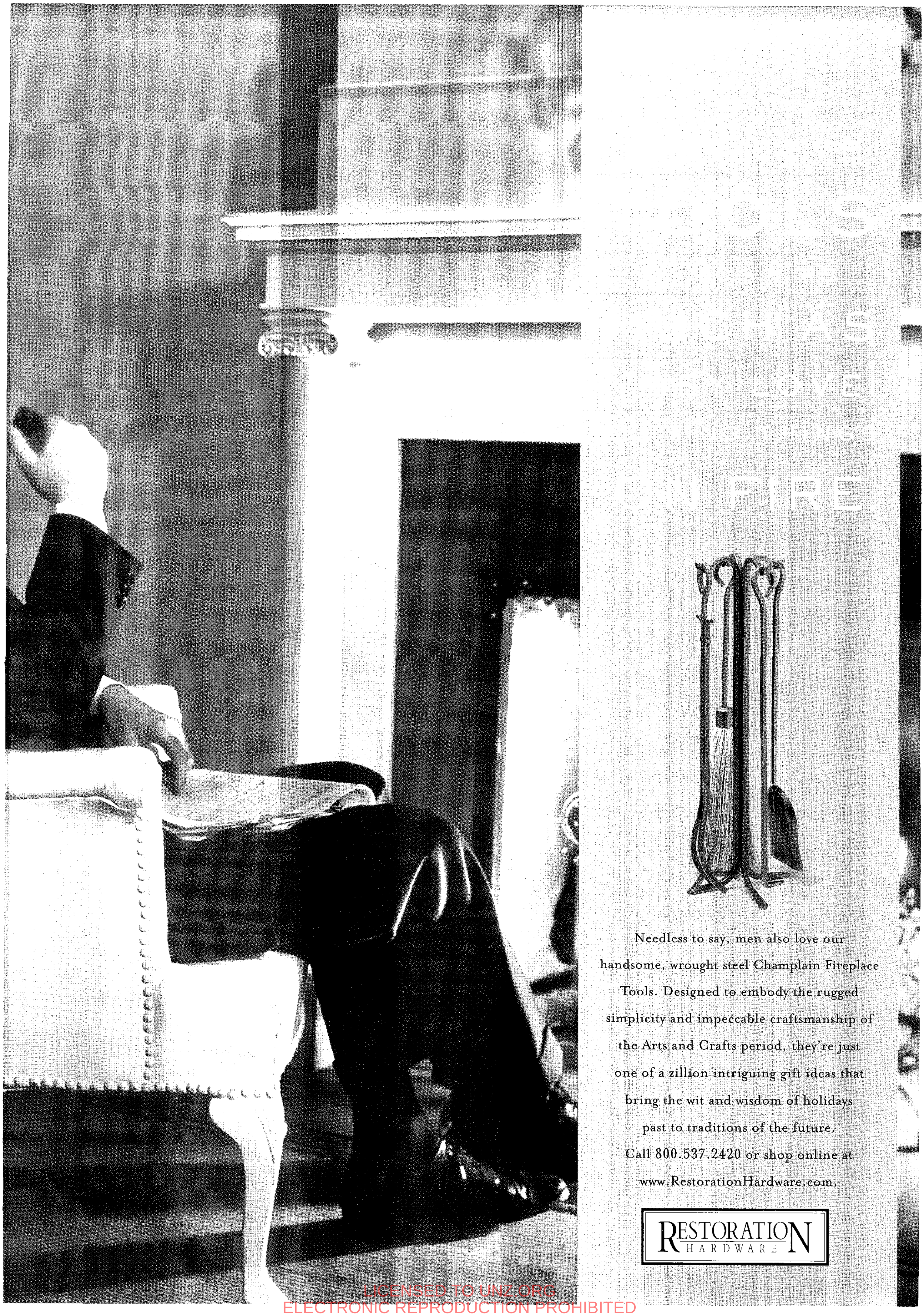
—Andrew Essex

INK

The Wall Street Journal loses a pocket-sized favorite.

For years and years and years and years, a brief article on a quirky topic appeared every day in the lower left-hand corner of the first page of the second section of the *Wall Street Journal.* The story was known inside the paper as the "orphan," because it was diminutive and vulnerable-looking, and because it seemed to have arrived at its position in the paper's layout through some possibly tragic process of editorial elimination. Despite its fillerlike dimensions, though, the orphan accounted for a disproportionate share of the *Journal's* impact on readers, by offering a cozy portal through which they could enter the vast gray acreage of the rest of the paper. Many readers turned to the orphan first, just as the guests at a cocktail party will automatically head for the smallest room.

The *Journal* underwent a partial redesign not long ago, and one result of that process was the orphaning of the



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orphan. As with so many modern ills, a share of the blame rests with Bill Gates: the orphan's old home has been paved over, in part, by a few more square inches of high-tech coverage. Michael Miller, who edits the page, contends that the orphan is still alive. "We just built a better orphanage," he said last week. But the item to which he refers is forty per cent shorter and fifty per cent skinnier than the old orphan, it appears only three times a week—if that—and it has been shoved all the way over to the other side of the page, where it is easily mistaken for the first few paragraphs of a tedious, to-be-continued report on the direction of something or other. It just isn't the same.

—DAVID OWEN

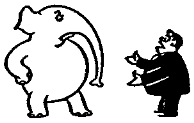
JESUS AND ELVIS

Twenty years after the death, St. Paul
was sending the first of his epistles,
and bits of myth or faithful memory—
multitudes fed on scraps, the dead small girl
told "Talitha, cumi"—were self-assembling
as proto-Gospels. Twenty years since pills
and chiliburgers did another in,
they gather at Graceland, the simple believers,
the turnpike pilgrims from the sere Midwest,
mother and daughter bleached to look alike,
Marys and Lazaruses, you and me,
brains riddled with song, with hand-tinted visions
of a lovely young man, reckless and cool
as a lily. He lives. We live. He lives.

—JOHN UPDIKE

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL

How the Democrats learned to love Tom DeLay.



EVERYONE knows that one can have too much of a good thing. But can one have too little of a bad thing? Some of the Democratic Party's top strategists apparently think so. In national politics, they reason, a really juicy enemy is worth any number of friends.

During the past few months, members of the House Democratic Caucus have quietly concluded that it is in the Democrats' best interest to keep Tom DeLay, the combative Republican House Whip, safely in office, talking as loudly and fearlessly as possible. DeLay, who is known among his colleagues as the Hammer, is wonderfully useful as a foil, and so, for this and other reasons, Washington Democrats have been reluctant to give financial help to any candidate who might want to run against him. Party officials worry that if DeLay were to have a race on his hands in next year's election, he might avoid the kind of inflammatory rhetoric that has made him such an excellent bogeyman. (Last summer, for instance, he blamed day care and the teaching of evolution in schools for the Columbine High School shootings.) Democratic strategists hope that DeLay's extreme social conservatism will scare Republican moderates across the nation into voting Democratic or, at least, staying home.

This has not been welcome news to aspiring Democrats in DeLay's home district, outside of Houston, Texas. Hill Kemp, a former Democratic state representative who unsuccessfully challenged DeLay in the 1998 congressional campaign, is particularly unhappy. The national Democrats like DeLay so much, Kemp says, that "they'd hire him a press agent if he'd let them." Kemp says that when he raised the prospect of running against DeLay a second time Matt Angle, the executive director of the House Democratic Caucus, told him that the Democrats would "be more likely to give me money in any other district in the country."

Of course, DeLay has the solid backing of numerous big conservative donors, and his seat is as safe a Republican seat as any in the country. So Democratic leaders feel that exploiting DeLay gives them a better chance of winning back a majority in the House than fighting him does. As Kemp says, "They'd rather have him unfettered, so that they can characterize the whole Republican Party as being just like him."

Texas Democrats aren't the only ones who are annoyed by the national Party's position on DeLay. Brent Blackwelder, the president of Friends of the Earth, regards DeLay as the archenemy of environmentalists everywhere. He said that when he heard that Democratic Party officials were giving DeLay a free pass, he considered it "a pathetic commentary on the state of the Democratic National Committee." He added, "It's saying that you're going to tolerate someone at the top of the Republican leadership who's doing everything he can to do you in, because it's so nice to have a target to run against. What does that say about your ethics?"

Tom Eisenhauer, the director of communications for the House Democratic Caucus, confirmed that his organization was rooting for DeLay. "It's probably worth five seats in the House to have Tom DeLay driving the Republicans in Congress," he said. But James Carville, the Democratic consultant, is reserving judgment. "The boy's showing some promise," he said grudgingly of DeLay, "but he's not Newt Gingrich yet. I think we got to keep feeding him more rope."

—JANE MAYER

THE MUSICAL LIFE

A bluegrass delegation at the Four Seasons.

AT one point in the concert given by Alison Krauss and her band, Union Station, at Town Hall a couple of weeks back, a college kid sashayed up and down the aisle between the loges

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and the balcony to the bluegrass music emanating from the stage. Near the end of the peformance, in response to a bluesy number called "Oh, Atlanta," twenty or so people in the audience clapped along in time, for about twenty seconds. That was it for audience participation. Generally, the audience concentrated on listening; its attentiveness would have done honor to a lieder recital in Salzburg.

Bluegrass music is enjoying a resurgence right now. And certainly a major component of this resurgence has to be Alison Krauss and her tight, talented band. In 1995, they issued a compilation recording called "Now That I've Found You" that went double platinum, won awards, and crossed over from country charts to pop charts. And her more recent record, "Forget About It," hit the *Billboard* chart at a respectable altitude. The main reasons for Krauss's emergence within this hitherto limited category are very simple—her voice and her musicianship. A fiddling champion since she was ten (she's not yet thirty), the recipient of a vocal gift so otherworldly that critics routinely reach to the highest spheres for their adjectives—"celestial," "angelic," etc.—and a demon song-finder and producer, Krauss is very good at what she does.

But it's more than that. There is a fragility about her—about her slender frame and her shy smile, her blond pixie hairdo, even about the earthiness of her stage patter—which makes you root for her. She's also funny. During the performance, when a feedback problem halted the proceedings for a few minutes, she told a story about a similar snafu in Oklahoma. The band had ultimately had to turn off the whole sound system and finish the show acoustically, and, of course, the audience loved it. One woman loved it so much that, after the concert, she asked Krauss, "Have you made any recordings like that—without microphones?"

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MARISA ACOCELLA

"Stop complaining. Who isn't broke?"

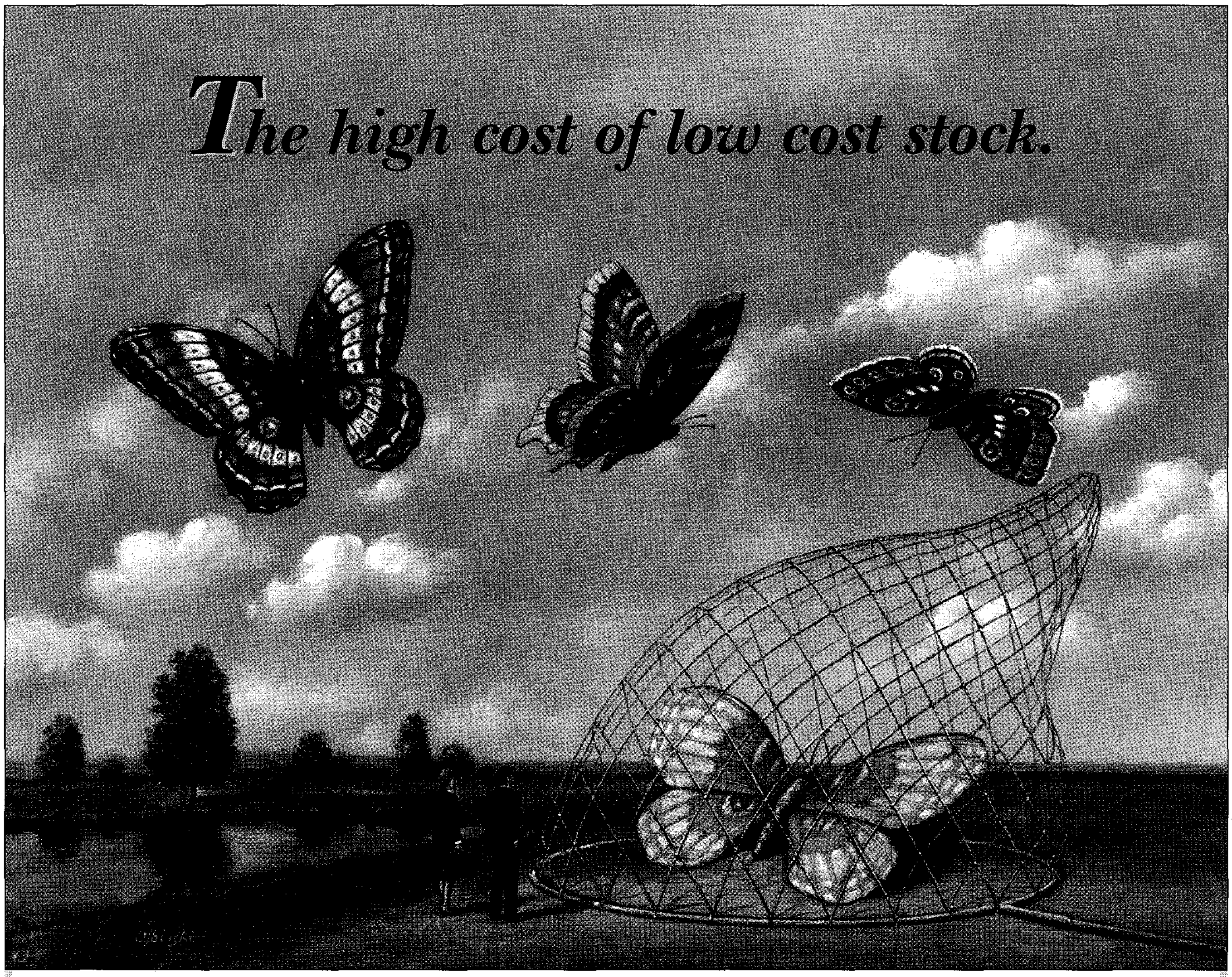
The next afternoon, Krauss, along with her husband, Pat Bergeson, who plays guitar in Lyle Lovett's band, their four-month-old son, and Krauss's manager, Denise Stiff—all of them except the baby tour-weary and dressed in jeans and plaid flannel shirts or work shirts—went to lunch at the Four Seasons. True, their host's last-minute invitation landed them all in Four Seasons Siberia (in the Pool Room, a narrow hallway away from Henry Kissinger and Philip Johnson and the rest of the moguls who dine in the Grill Room), but, then, Krauss makes music, not deals, and she didn't seem fazed at all. "Is this the most wonderful thing in the world?" she asked the waiter, about the warm spinach salad on the menu. "Is it the most wonderful thing in the world?" she asked again later, about the Fancy Cake. All the while, the baby slept in her lap.

Krauss said that she had started taking classical violin lessons when she was five. She was first drawn to bluegrass by the vocal harmonies, and she talked a lot about how she came by her fiddle—one that she uses all the time and that she has no backup for. She first saw it when she was fourteen, in a collection composed of tag-sale acquisitions and other serendipities amassed by a veteran of the Second World War who had had both ears damaged in combat and was nearly deaf. He lived in western Kentucky and called his collection "mah vah-o-leeyuns." The collector didn't want to part with the "vah-o-leeyun" that Krauss liked—at least, not until she was a little older—but when he died she was finally able to buy it, from the man's widow. She likes the fiddle so much because, she said, "on the low notes you don't just hear the strings, you hear the wood. And the high strings are dark—you know, not harsh."

Someone at the table asked if she ever played classical music anymore.

"No, it's too hard," she said. "We do things because we're good at them but also because"—and here she leaned forward, and said in a stage whisper—"*we like to hide our limitations!*"

—DANIEL MENAKER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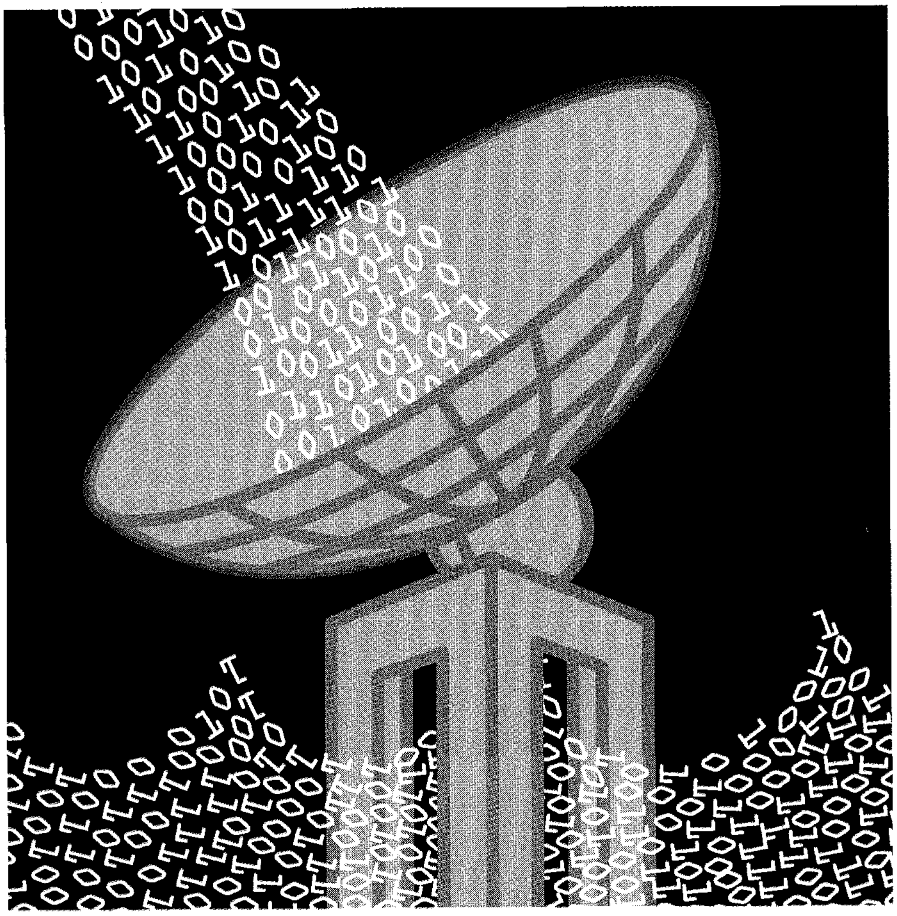
ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE INTELLIGENCE GAP

How the digital age left our spies out in the cold.

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

THE National Security Agency, whose Cold War research into code breaking and electronic eavesdropping spurred the American computer revolution, has become a victim of the high-tech world it helped to create. Through mismanagement, arrogance, and fear of the unknown, the senior military and civilian bureaucrats who work at the agency's headquarters, in suburban Fort Meade, Maryland, have failed to prepare fully for today's high-volume flow of E-mail and fibre-optic transmissions—even as nations throughout Europe, Asia, and the Third World have begun exchanging diplomatic and national-security messages encrypted in unbreakable digital code.

The N.S.A.'s failures don't make the headlines. In May, 1998, India's first round of nuclear tests, which took place in Pokharan, southwest of New Delhi, caught Washington by surprise, and provoked criticism of the Central Intelligence Agency from the press and from Congress. But it was the N.S.A., in the days and weeks before the detonations, that did not detect signs of increased activity or increased communications at Pokharan. "It's a tough problem," one nuclear-intelligence expert told me, because India's nuclear-weapons establishment now sends encrypted digital messages by satellite, using small dishes that bounce signals beyond the stratosphere through a system known as VSAT ("very small aperture terminal")—a two-way version of the system widely used for DirecTV.

Similarly, the North Koreans, with the help of funds from the United Nations, according to one United States intelligence official, have bought encrypted cell phones from Europe, high-speed switching gear from Britain, and up-to-date dialling service from America—a system that the N.S.A. cannot readily read. The official said of the North Koreans, "All their military stuff went off ether into fibre"—from high-frequency radio transmission to fibre-optic cable lines, which transmit a vast volume of digital data as a stream of light. A former high-level Defense Department official told me, "It's a worldwide problem. You could wire up all of Africa for less than two billion dollars." This former official, like most of the two dozen signals-intelligence (SIGINT) experts interviewed for this account, agreed to speak only after being assured of anonymity. A 1951 federal law prohibits any discussion or publication of communications intelligence.

The decline of the N.S.A. is widely known in Washington's national-security community. "The dirty little secret is that fibre optics and encryption are kicking Fort Meade in the nuts," a recently retired senior officer in the C.I.A.'s Directorate of Operations told me. "It's over. Everywhere I went in the Third World, I wanted to have someone named Ahmed, a backhoe driver, on the payroll. And I wanted to know where the fibre-optic cable was hidden. In a crisis, I wanted Ahmed to go and break up the cable, and force them up in the air"—that is, force communications to be broadcast by radio signals. The number of daily satellite-telephone calls in the Arab world, many of which are encrypted, is in the millions, creating severe difficulties for eavesdroppers. The mobile-telephone system used by Saddam Hussein at the height of Iraq's dispute last year with a United Nations arms-control inspection team operated on more than nine hundred channels. Each channel was separately encrypted, with multiple keys, and Saddam's conversations bounced from channel to channel with each call. A U.N. intelligence team eventually gained access to the telephone system's technical manuals and other data, and was able to record the encrypted conversations, but without these materials it could not have made sense of

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the intercepts. The code-makers are leaving the code-breakers far behind.

IN its heyday, during the Cold War, the N.S.A. had nearly ninety-five thousand employees, more than half of them in the military, monitoring communications from hundreds of sites around the world. It played a dominant role in American intelligence gathering behind the Iron Curtain and elsewhere, producing by the end of the nineteen-sixties more than a thousand intelligence reports a day. The N.S.A.'s intercepts were the government's most reliable and important sources of intelligence on the Soviet Union—far outstripping the intelligence collected by the C.I.A. and its agents abroad. In Western Europe, N.S.A. linguists and Army G.I.s sat in unmarked vans monitoring the daily conversations of Soviet tank units on the other side of the Berlin Wall. In the Pacific, Air Force radiomen and N.S.A. technicians, in specially configured Boeing 707s, flew huge figure eights over the ocean, copying Morse-code transmissions from North Korea and the Soviet Far East. In the Mediterranean, Navy signalmen worked hectic shifts with their N.S.A. colleagues, eavesdropping on government communications in the Middle East. Many of the most sophisticated Soviet codes were broken, including the diplomatic traffic to Moscow from its Embassy in Washington. By the time President Nixon was in office, the agency was listening to telephone conversations of Soviet leaders as they were driven in limousines to and from the Kremlin. In the upper reaches of the United States government, access to the agency's daily top-secret "take" was a sign of importance and success. Henry A. Kissinger, Nixon's national-security adviser, went as far as to order the agency to scan the diplomatic traffic from Washington, isolate references to him, and deliver the cables to his office, without any further distribution inside the government. Many of his successors have received the same service.

These successes were the payoff for years of painstaking technical research. In the nineteen-fifties and sixties, the N.S.A.'s engineers, working closely with the American computer industry, coördinated and financed much of the early work in telecommunications, underwriting research on semiconductors, high-speed circuitry, and transistorized computers. With its research into microelectronics, the agency also helped to develop the early guidance systems for intercontinental ballistic nuclear missiles. And the agency's team of mathematicians—aided by outside advisers, many of whom were tenured at places such as Harvard, Dartmouth, and Princeton—steadily tore through the Soviet cipher systems.

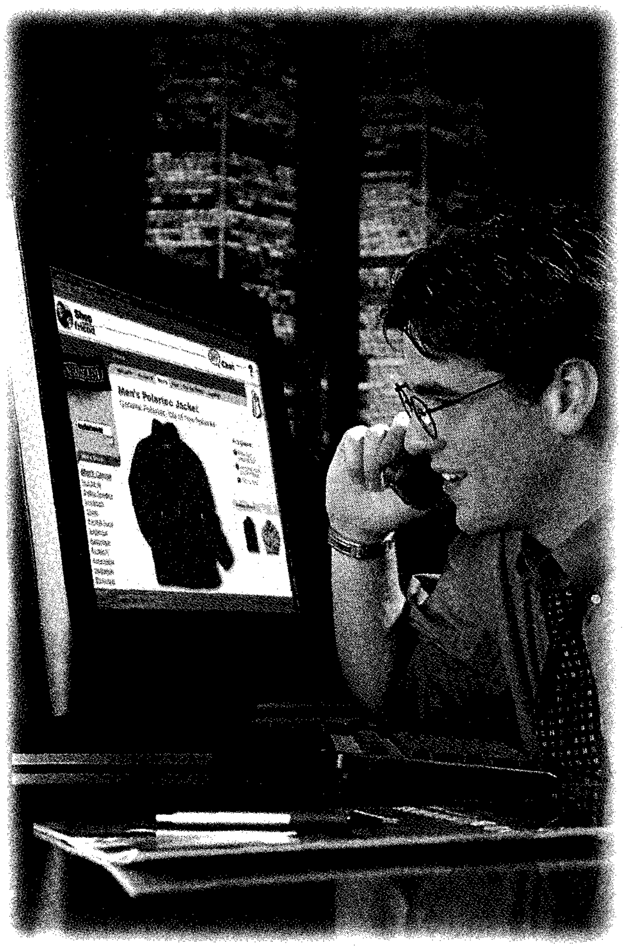
By the mid-seventies, as the world began routinely communicating by microwave, the agency maintained its edge with innovative use of satellite intelligence, and its mathematicians and computer experts were sometimes able to thwart the Russians' attempts to scramble their signals. Even undersea and underground coaxial cables—the most secure means then of relaying telephone conversations and electronic communications—could be intercepted. Books and newspaper articles have described the penetration of Soviet cables at sea by N.S.A. units aboard Navy submarines as some of the most daring intelligence operations of the Cold War.

The collapse of Communism, in 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, led to a revised mission for the N.S.A., with more focus on international terrorism and drug dealing—both highly elusive targets. The agency's budget was cut back. In the early nineties, as more nations turned to fibre optics, the N.S.A. shut down twenty of its forty-two radio listening posts around the world. (In some cases, equipment was left behind to be monitored remotely.) The agency's overseas military personnel have been reduced by half.

The N.S.A.'s status within the government has also been diminished. Last year, Richard Lardner, a reporter for the Washington newsletter *Inside the Pentagon*, revealed that the agency had been "reined in" and would no longer be authorized to report directly to the Secretary of Defense. The N.S.A. was ordered instead to report through an Assistant Secretary. In recent years, according to a congressional study, the N.S.A.'s contribution to the President's daily intelligence brief—a secret summary prepared at the C.I.A. every morning for the White House—has fallen by nearly twenty per cent. The N.S.A. was being jarred by the difficulties of tracking terrorism, and by the rapid spread of unbreakable codes. The agency also discovered that it had few advocates in the White House and among those officials at the Office of Management and Budget who control the flow of money to the top-secret world. The agency was not allowed to keep the funds it had saved by reducing manpower and drastically cutting overseas stations.

The N.S.A. is also getting very little help from its colleagues in the American intelligence community. One legislative aide told me that George Tenet, the director of Central Intelligence, who has nominal responsibility for all intelligence gathering, had expressed alarm upon taking office about the N.S.A.'s weakness, and told congressmen of his desire to rescue the agency from what appeared to be a "precipitous calamity." But, the aide added, "he didn't do it."

The N.S.A.'s strongest supporters—the members and staffs of the Senate and House intelligence committees—are also its most vocal critics. The agency is now facing the most caustic congressional scrutiny in its history, amid much pessimism that it can right itself without major changes in its management. Staff members of the intelligence-oversight committees traditionally prefer not to be quoted by name, but John Millis, a former C.I.A. officer who is staff director of the House intelligence committee, openly discussed the N.S.A.'s problems in the fall of 1998 at a luncheon meeting with a group of retired C.I.A. officers. "Signals intelligence is in a crisis," Millis told his former colleagues, who reprinted the speech in a newsletter. "We have been living in the glory days of SIGINT over the last fifty years, since World War II." He went on, "Technology has been the friend of the N.S.A., but in the last four or five years technology has moved from being the friend to being the



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enemy." Millis also made it clear that any significant increase in the agency's budget was made more difficult by the fact that "there is no management of the intelligence community. There is no one in a position to make the tradeoffs within the intelligence community that will make a coherent, efficient organization that will function as a whole. So we end up doing it on Capitol Hill. And I've got to tell you, if you are depending on Capitol Hill to do something as important as this, you're in trouble."

SENATOR ROBERT KERREY, of Nebraska, the ranking Democrat on the Senate's intelligence committee, told me that there was little he could add to Millis's assessment, because most information dealing with the agency and its work is highly classified. Kerrey also pointed out that secrecy "does not equal security," and can be self-defeating. For example, the agency is in desperate need of more money to get started on information-retrieval programs for the Internet which should have been under way years ago. "But I can't tell you how much they need," Kerrey said, "and I can't tell you how much they have. The public doesn't know about the N.S.A., or what it is. There are no editorials in the New York *Times*, no advocates. Does the public know that the nation might be more secure if more was invested? Out of sight, out of mind."

Last July, during a little-noticed Senate colloquy on an intelligence-spending bill, Kerrey hinted at the N.S.A.'s problems. "The signals are becoming more complex and difficult to process," he said. "And they are becoming more and more encrypted." Because of the sophistication of current encryption systems for E-mail and other communications, he said, "we will find our people on the intelligence side coming back and saying, 'Look, I know something bad happened . . . I couldn't make sense of the signal. We intercept, and all we get is a buzz and background noise. We cannot interpret. We can't convert it.' "

Kerrey says that his concern was heightened by a report on the N.S.A. that was filed last year by an unusual study group that he and Senator Richard C. Shelby, Republican of Alabama and the committee's chairman, had put together. Secret congressional studies are routine, but the Senate team, known as the Technical Advisory Group, included a number of prominent outsiders—men who were in charge of research and technology for major American high-tech corporations, such as George Spix, of Microsoft, Bran Ferren, of the Walt Disney Company, and a nuclear-weapons physicist, Dr. Lowell Wood, of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The outsiders were given full clearance and access to many of the most sensitive areas at the Fort Meade headquarters. Their conclusions were devastating. "We told them that unless you totally change your intelligence-collection systems you will go deaf," one involved official told me. "You've got ten years."

The advisory group put much of the blame for the agency's problems on the stagnation and rigidity of the senior civilian management. "The N.S.A.'s party line to Congress is 'We're fine. We don't need to change,' " the official told me. "It's like a real Communist organization. Free thought is not encouraged" among the managers. Referring to the senior bureaucracy, the official said that the agency would "have to fire almost everyone." This official and others singled out Barbara A. McNamara, the current N.S.A. deputy director, as someone especially resistant to change. "She's leading a cohort of thirty-year veterans who go back to radio"—a reference to high-frequency radio transmissions—"and think nothing is needed," the official said. In secret testimony this fall before Congress, he added, McNamara talked about "how good the N.S.A. is—how it caught this and that drug guy. They got a whole bunch of horseshit from Barbara."

In subsequent interviews, many former N.S.A. managers endorsed the advisory group's findings. One former official described the civilian leadership as "a self-licking ice-cream cone," with little tolerance for dissent or information it did not wish to hear. "If you didn't support their position, you weren't considered a team player," this person told me. "You couldn't go into a meeting, put your best ideas on the table, have it out, get the best idea, and then go have a beer." McNamara's authority stems from her longevity: the admirals and generals who serve the agency director remain on the job for an average of three years before retiring or going on to other military assignments. The agency's top civilians have worked together, in many cases, for nearly thirty years, and inevitably share the same insular points of

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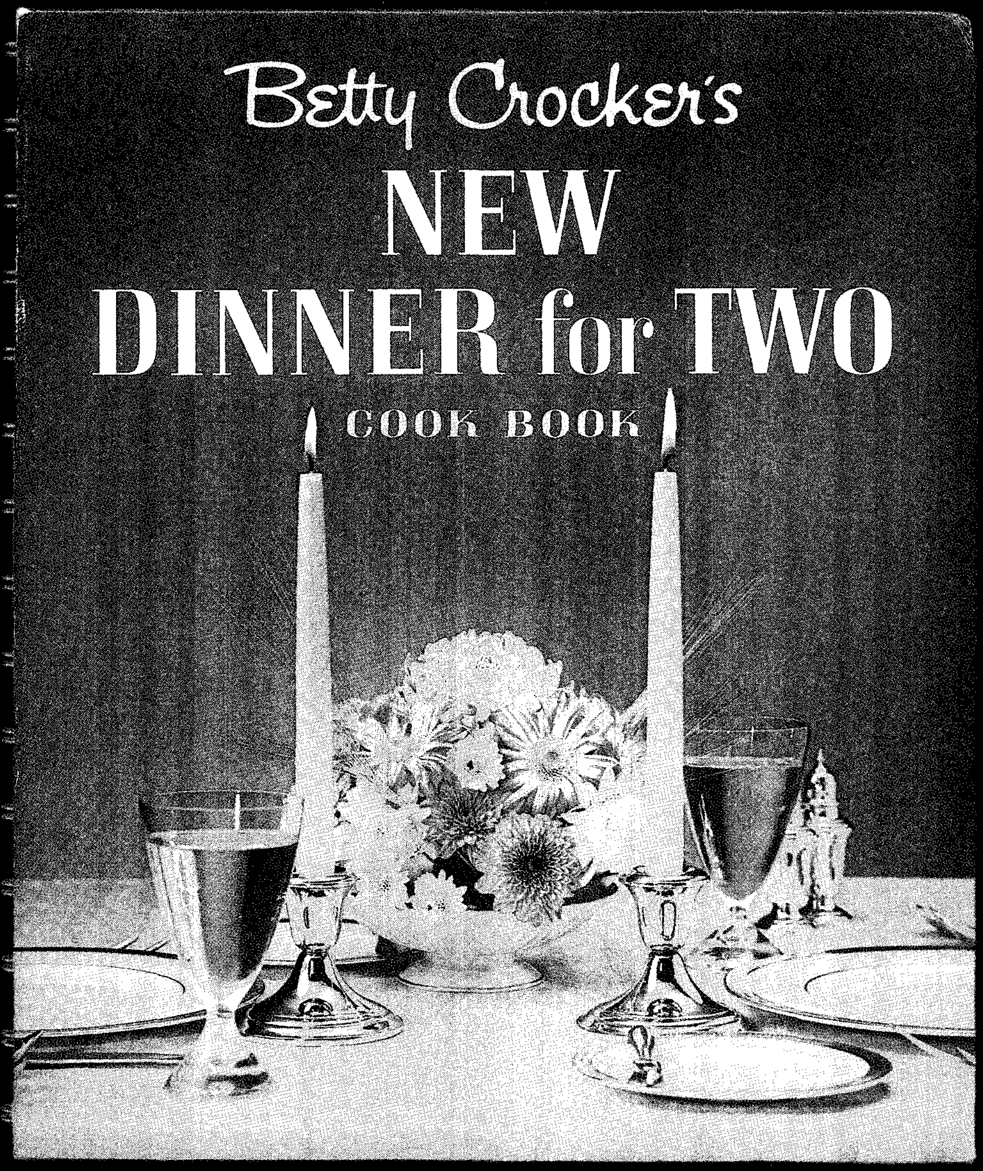
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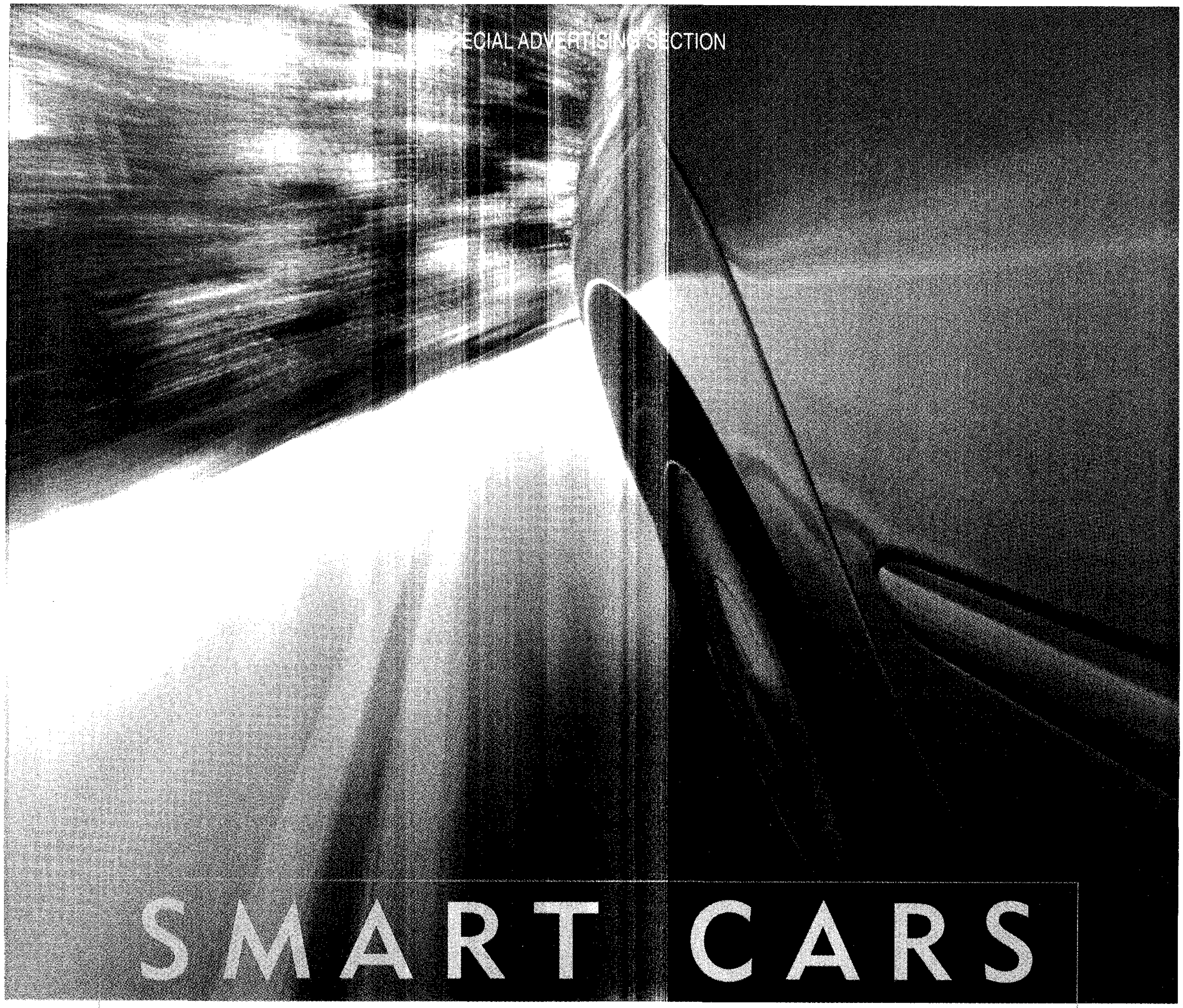
view. Another recently retired official told me that the N.S.A. has become a dynastic bureaucracy, in which the fathers have made room for their sons, with the wives and mothers of favored employees hired as mid-level staff in the human-resources office. "The place is full of warlords and fiefdoms," the former official said. "Now we're getting to the *grandchildren*." Such insider hiring has led to the quip, which I heard from a number of officials, that the N.S.A. functions as a "Glen Burnie W.P.A. project." Glen Burnie is a nearby suburb, and home to many N.S.A. employees. Questions also were raised during my interviews about the effectiveness of many of the senior military officers who are routinely assigned to the N.S.A. for two-, three-, or four-year tours of duty. Some perform brilliantly, but far too many find themselves put in charge of units for which they are unqualified, and end up relying extensively on their civilian staffs. "We call them the summer help," a former manager told me, adding that the smart ones generally seek to get reassigned as soon as possible.

The Technical Advisory Group urged that the agency immediately begin a major reorganization, and start planning for the recruitment of several thousand skilled computer scientists. One of their missions would be to devise software and write information-retrieval programs that would enable the agency to make sense of the data routinely sucked up by satellite and other interception devices. The vast majority of telephone calls, E-mails, and faxes are not encrypted—almost all are sent as plain text—but the N.S.A. has been overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the intercepted data, much of which is irrelevant. "They're still collecting a lot of digital," one of the agency's consultants told me, "and can't do anything with it." The consultant added that agency managers recently estimated that Fort Meade had three years' worth of storage capacity for intercepted Internet traffic. "They filled it in eleven months," he said.

"The bottom line is they've got to retool," the advisory-group official said. "It will take a lot of money and effort—like starting the N.S.A. again." Far from being able to retool, the agency has suffered a severe brain drain in recent years, losing mid-career managers to the high pay and upward mobility of private industry. One former senior official described



SMART CARS

TECHNOLOGY IN MOTION

by Tony Swan

It's a little daunting to think that your car may be smarter than its owner. After all, today's average automobile has more memory and faster data-processing capability than the average personal computer of, say, ten years ago. It can "think" faster than you can; its concentration is unswerving and its ability to recall pertinent events is pretty much infallible. And it can't just conveniently forget either. If some highway patrol officer was authorized to download your car's data on how fast you'd been driving recently, the facts would be inarguable. Convicted by your own car.

On the other hand, your car's brain is incapable of concerning itself with the great thoughts of Western man—Descartes, Whitehead, or whether the Yankees will ever lose a World Series. It concerns itself with issues that most of us would find as riveting as the chemical composition of tofu—things like managing the proper fuel-air mixture for every explosion in every cylinder during every revolution of the engine's crankshaft. Engineers call each of these mini-bangs a "combustion event," and in the course of a half-hour commute, your car is likely to stage-manage about a million or two of them.

And that's just a routine housekeeping chore. While it's minding the internal combustion stew, your car's command center may also be managing a climate control system, shifting the gears of the automatic transmission, monitoring road conditions, guarding against skids when you apply the brakes, and, if necessary, taking measures to keep you and the passing scenery from becoming too closely involved.

This electronic juggling act is made possible by our new friend, the microchip, and thanks to the age of the computer, motor vehicle systems include an astounding range of capabilities, with more to come. And all of them are essentially accessible to the user, not to mention Y2K compliant.

Buick Hits a Homer

Yogi Berra would be proud. Buick's all-new 2000 LeSabre will come equipped with a special safety feature called, aptly enough, the "Catcher's Mitt"™—a front seat designed to reduce the potential for whiplash injuries in some rear-impact collisions.

The first domestic brand to feature the Catcher's Mitt, Buick describes this technological safety feature as a high-retention seat with an active head restraint designed to absorb energy and retain a properly positioned passenger's pelvis and lower back in the seat "pocket." Essentially, as the force from a rear impact collision jerks the occupant's body backward, that same energy causes the seat's built-in, self-aligning head restraint to move up and forward, closer to the occupant's head, thus reducing head motion. Serious neck injuries from rear impacts could possibly be eliminated through this simple mechanical device.

"This car is one of the safest on the road, bar none," said Byron A. Kearney, 2000 LeSabre's chief engineer. "With all the improvements we've made to this vehicle, we're at the head of the pack in terms of comfort, reliability, and especially safety."

Supplied by Lear Corp., the 2000 LeSabre is the first domestic car to offer the Catcher's Mitt. Yankee ingenuity at its best. **For more information, visit the Buick Web site at www.buick.com.**

Courtesy of Buick

STABILITY FOR SALE.

Startling news: some drivers will occasionally find themselves in troubling situations that are beyond their ability to control. Examples: carrying too much speed into a corner or encountering an abrupt transition from dry pavement to slick. Or both. All car manufacturers now offer systems designed to help you keep your car between the lines, although the more sophisticated creations are still confined largely to luxury cars—BMW, Cadillac, Lexus, Mercedes-Benz, and Porsche, to name a few.

Sold under a blizzard of acronyms worthy of Depression-era government agencies—ESP (for the Mercedes Electronic Stability Program), PSM (Porsche Stability Management), DSC (for BMW's Dynamic Stability Control)—these systems have one broad commonality: the ability to intervene on the driver's behalf to avert disaster.

> "...your car may be smarter than you are."

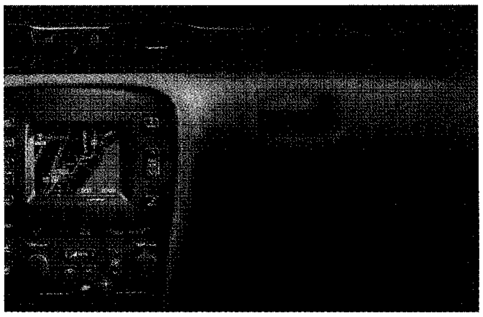
Cadillac's 2000 DeVille sedan provides an excellent example, with its sophisticated CVRSS (Continuously Variable Road Sensing Suspension) and StabiLiTrak systems. Acting on information provided by a network of sensors, the system computer uses the data to interpret the driver's intent and compare it to what the car is actually doing. For example, if the driver is turning the steering wheel, but the car's response doesn't jibe with the level of steering input, the computer can intervene in several ways: It can alter the firmness of one or more of the car's shock absorbers, to reduce body roll; apply one or more of the car's brakes to slow the car until it's back on the intended path; or it can reduce engine power—again, to slow things down.

The result is a car that's a much stronger ally in emergency maneuvers. And the next horizon, soon to be offered in the 2000 Mercedes CL-500 Class coupe, is an active suspension system that anticipates maneuvers and instantly retunes components to enhance handling.

COMMAND PERFORMANCE.

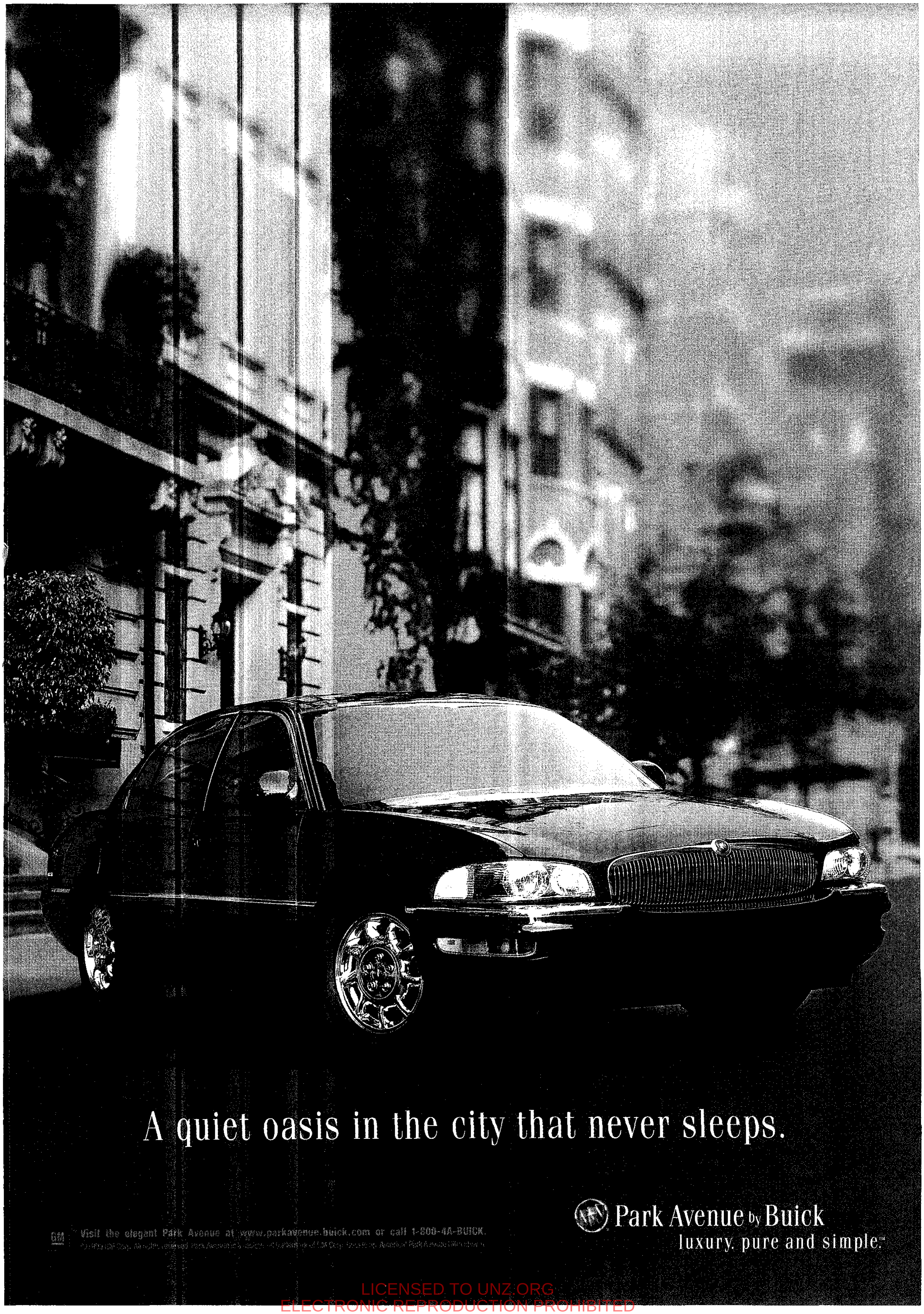
We're not yet to the point where you'll be able to tell your car to take you to the supermarket all by itself. But voice-activated auxiliary systems are already with us. For example, the new Jaguar S-type sedan offers voice activation for its audio system, climate controls, and cellular phone—an industry first. Big advantage: the driver's hands remain on the steering wheel.

What's next? Buick, among others, is experimenting with a variety of advanced voice-command functions, including keyless ignition switches that activate when they hear their master's voice. There are obvious drawbacks. What if you've got laryngitis? What if you want to lend your car to someone else? But functions such as telling your navigation system to find the shortest route to downtown Poughkeepsie are coming, and soon.



Courtesy of Cadillac

Cover Photo: Bob Torrez/TSI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CONTROLLING INFLATION.

There's no question that air bags have saved lives, but the first generation of these supplementary restraint systems has also caused injuries. Those consequences will be all but impossible with new designs that are now making their way into cars.

Ford's new frontal air bag system, standard equipment in the new Taurus and Sable sedans, is a good example. Called the "Personal Safety System," its air bags are designed for two levels of deployment: rapid, for severe impacts, and a gentler level for crashes that fall below the severe threshold. The system factors in elements such as the proximity of the driver to the steering wheel and whether front seat occupants are wearing safety belts to determine the air bag deployment force.

Beyond that, system sensors "read" the crash energy released in the early stages of the impact, sending the data to the computer for a more focused response. The ability of the system to process and act on this data in the available nanoseconds is yet another index of the processing speed of contemporary automotive computers.

VISIONARY TECHNOLOGY.

It's hard for any driver to respond to things he or she can't see. That's why, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, about half of all fatal car accidents occur at night, despite the fact that there are fewer drivers on the road. Similarly, sixty per cent of pedestrian fatalities occur after dark.

Cadillac's new Night Vision system, introduced as an option on the new DeVille 2000, is one of the most dramatic responses to this challenge. Developed in cooperation with Raytheon, Night Vision is basically a thermal imaging system that "sees" the world in the infrared spectrum. Comparable to military applications, the Cadillac system gathers infrared energy through a grille-mounted camera, then projects a holographic image on the inner surface of your windshield.

"Hot" (animate) objects—lurking deer, for example—generate brighter images, making them easier to spot, and Cadillac claims that the system can see three to five times farther than we can when we rely on the car's low-beam headlights. Similar in concept, though not as dramatic, are proximity warning systems that alert the driver to objects that are getting too close for the car's electronic comfort. Think of it as automotive radar.

Illustration by Michael W. Speigner

This is the linchpin of the new adaptive cruise control that's about to be introduced by Mercedes-Benz. When the system's monitors detect a slower car in the lane ahead, its brain adjusts the cruise control setting to match speeds. A variation on this idea uses sonar technology to detect objects behind the vehicle during backup maneuvers. Sensors feed such data to the computer, which issues warning beeps when the vehicle is getting too close to something. The new DeVille, as well as several Ford Motor Company vehicles, are equipped with reverse-warning systems.

Mercury Sable's Comfort Zone

Straining to reach a car's pedals is uncomfortable, and sitting too close to the steering wheel is likely to be unsafe. And many drivers of differing height and stature wouldn't mind more flexibility.

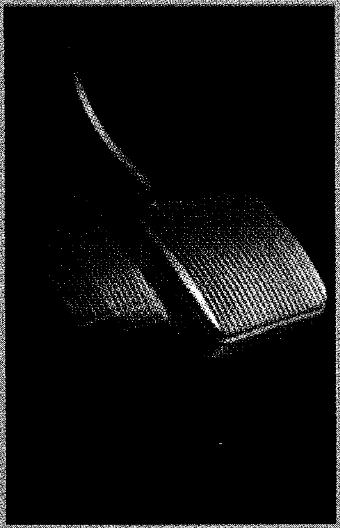
An easy repositioning of the brake and accelerator pedals would make for an ideal set-up—whether it's for a dash to the supermarket or a long-distance cross-country haul.

In 2000, drivers will be able to do precisely that, thanks to power adjustable accelerator and brake pedals, a feature now available in the new 2000 Mercury Sable.

With the touch of a button, both pedals can be adjusted up to three inches toward the driver from the standard position to provide added driving comfort and flexibility, as well as to optimize the driver's position relative to the steering wheel.

The power adjustable pedals are just one of many technological advances in the Sable. According to Mark Hutchins, president of Lincoln Mercury, "The 2000 Mercury Sable is the sophisticated, forward-thinking alternative to the everyday sedan."

Mercury's forward thinking also includes a sophisticated Personal Safety System and a new, standard emergency trunk release. **For more information on the new Sable, visit www.mercuryvehicles.com.**



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Driving Tomorrow's Technology

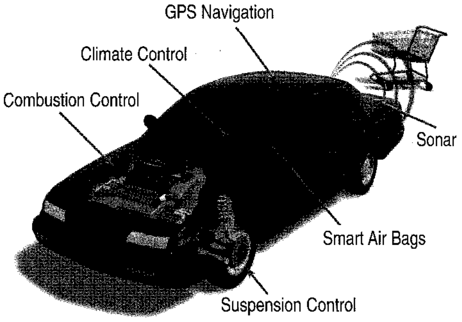

Illustration by Michael W. Speigner

On the horizon are laser-based systems that can cut through rain, fog, snow, and other low-visibility conditions, as well as mere darkness.

ARE WE THERE YET?

Navigation systems involving a dashboard video display terminal, global positioning systems (GPS), and a CD ROM component with highly detailed maps are no longer new. Neither are cellular and/or satellite phones with fax and modem capabilities—now standard elements in the modern mobile office. That's why so many new vehicles are sprouting extra power plug-in points.

But, there are ongoing improvements. For example, satellite phones, which are far less likely to be in signal-dead zones than their cellular cousins, are becoming less bulky. The latest trend in "nav" systems, meanwhile, is a voice element that tells the driver when and where to turn, eliminating the need to constantly consult the video map. Better yet will be navigation systems that allow the driver to have verbal input; you'll be able to tell the system you don't like the chosen route and, for that matter, you've decided you don't really want to go to the office after all.

One sobering aspect of the GPS phenomenon is that it may soon be impossible to simply "get away from it all," at least in an automobile. Even though you may be lost, your car will always know where you are.

(Tony Swan is the senior editor of *Car and Driver* magazine.)

Delphi's Mobile MultiMedia: Well Connected

The computer age has transformed our homes and offices. Now, it's about to do the same for the cars we drive. At the forefront of this new technology is Delphi Automotive Systems' Communiport® Mobile MultiMedia, a line of electronic products designed to increase productivity by bringing consumers more information, communication, and entertainment while they're behind the wheel.

The majority of these advanced products merge various functions based on Digital Signal Processing, including wireless communication, open computer platforms and full map, turn-by-turn audio navigation systems with text-to-speech capability and hands-free voice activation—important features that will allow for greater convenience should the motorist need to access information while driving.

Says Dave Wohleen, president of Delphi Delco Electronics Systems:"Growing consumer demand for these products is being driven by the desire to have more convenience, connectivity, and entertainment options while driving. These factors—coupled with the affordability of powerful microprocessors and advances in wireless communications, flat-panel displays, and voice processing—make these products very attractive."

Communiport's infrared data interface system will enable consumers with cellular phones and portable electronic devices to interact with and coordinate both personal digital assistants and personal computers, easily transferring information back and forth.

These new electronic features, customized to car manufacturer's specifications, are located in the dashboard along with the radio and climate controls. "Soft," reconfigurable keys can be used for multifunctions—information, entertainment, and communication. For instance, users can program the keys to receive limited Internet information such as stock quotes or sports scores, then reprogram the keys for voice-activated phone message and E-mail retrieval.

A separate technology, called "Head-Up Display," which can be integrated with the Communiport technologies, projects critical safety and navigation information on the windshield, just below the driver's sight line.

Open operating systems and application programs such as Microsoft Windows CE® and Sun Microsystems' Java™ power all of Communiport's products. Through these wireless systems, pager messages and other forms of electronic mail can be sent and received. Drivers can also access real-time news bulletins and business information, all of which can then be downloaded from the Internet.

Also included in Delphi's portfolio of Communiport technologies are integrated antenna electronics and advanced playbacks such as CD-ROM, DVD, and MP3. "Mobile MultiMedia is going to revolutionize the driving experience by providing much of the information, entertainment, and communication capabilities people now have in their homes or offices," said Jeffrey J. Owens, general director of engineering at Delphi Delco Electronics Systems.

For more information, visit Delphi at www.delphiauto.com.

Courtesy of Delphi Automotive Systems

We're bringing tomorrow's technology into the car you drive.

PAY-PER-VIEW

Delphi Automotive Systems is leading the way in bringing satellite communications into the car you drive. Our Communiport® Mobile MultiMedia System will deliver E-mail, provide directions, let you order a movie, play a game and more, all through your car's computer. Developed in combination with IBM®, Netscape® and Sun Microsystems®, many of these advanced features are already being designed into vehicles you will be driving in the coming years. To learn how Delphi is strategically positioned to develop the smart systems of tomorrow, visit www.delphiauto.com.

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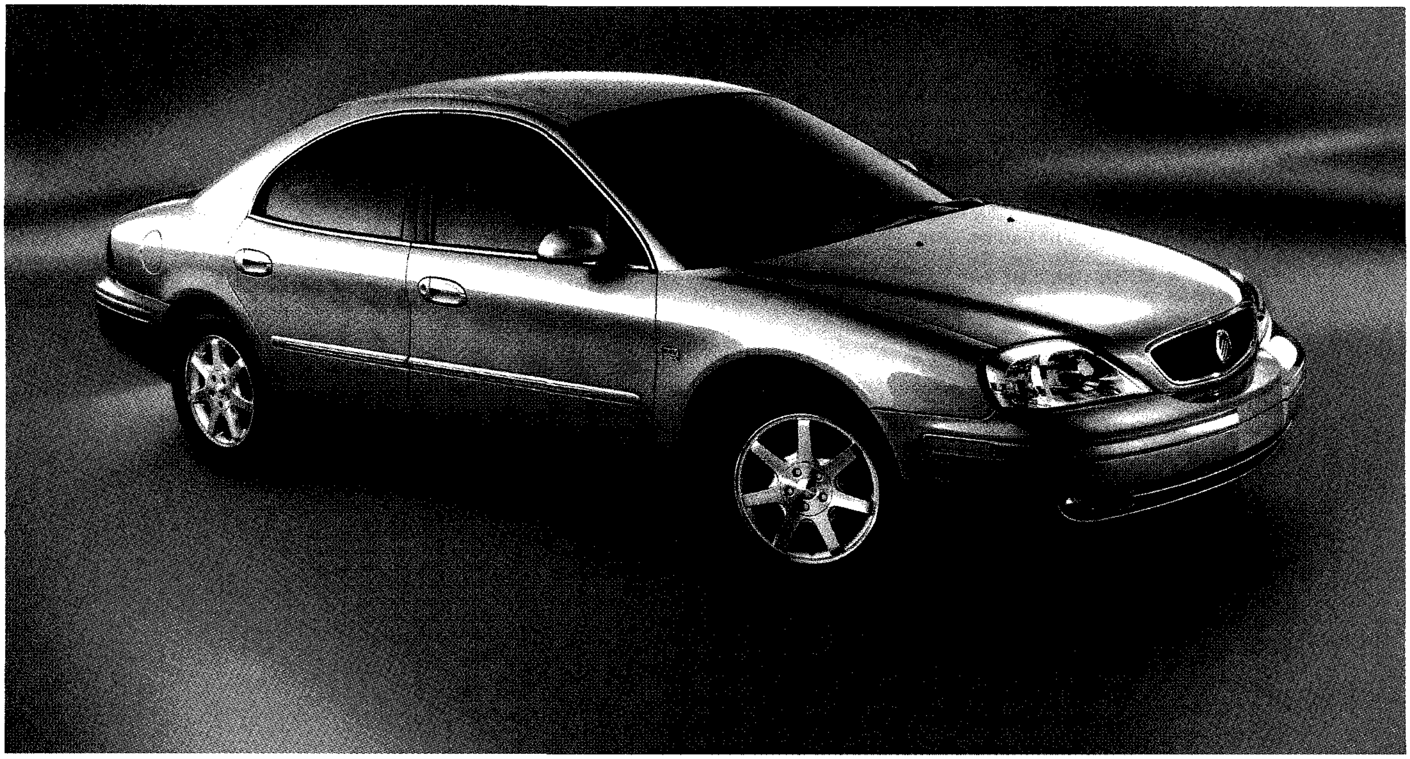

2000 Sable

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the process as self-defeating: the agency's recognized need for more outside contact with, and stimulation by, the computer world is offset by the fact that its budding young experts "meet new people and then get hired away by them."

THE N.S.A.'s current alienation from the computer gurus in industry and academia might not have occurred if two Californians with a fascination for the mathematics of cryptoanalysis hadn't decided to compare notes more than two decades ago. A 1951 law gave the government the right to classify as secret any invention considered potentially harmful to national security, but in November, 1976, Whitfield Diffie, a computer scientist, and Martin E. Hellman, a Stanford University electrical engineer, published a revolutionary technical paper on what has become known as public key cryptography. Before their work, an encrypted message could be understood only if the sender and receiver had the same key, or decoder, to turn the scrambled letters into readable text. The beauty of the Diffie-Hellman breakthrough was its simplicity: the message would have two keys—one could be registered in a public directory (today it might be on the Internet) and the other would be known only to the intended recipient. One key would be used to encipher the message and the other to decipher it. A senior N.S.A. official has described the Diffie-Hellman concept as a series of computations that are easy to do but hard to reverse, like breaking a window.

To the agency's dismay, the world now had access to a sophisticated level of cryptography that had not been previously fully understood even by N.S.A. analysts. In 1978, when George I. Davida, a computer scientist at the University of Wisconsin, tried to patent an encryption device he had invented, the N.S.A. invoked the 1951 secrecy law. Davida took his case to the media, and the agency, prodded by attorneys in the Carter Administration, eventually backed down, but the message was clear—the agency would do all it could to prevent public access to encryption techniques.

By the early nineties, the telephone system had been deregulated, the computer market was booming, and the Internet was beginning its ride, but the N.S.A.'s policy remained static: encryption was defined as a "weapons system" whose export was controlled by the government. The debate over encryption was now a public controversy, with the government arrayed against privacy advocates, academics, and a computer industry that was bemoaning the annual loss of billions of dollars to foreign manufacturers whose computers included high-powered encryption.

In 1993, law-enforcement officials further infuriated the computer industry by beginning a criminal investigation of Philip R. Zimmermann, a software engineer then living in Boulder, Colorado. Zimmermann's crime was being a free-spirited hacker; he cobbled together a cryptography program called P.G.P.—for Pretty Good Privacy—and gave it away. P.G.P. was the agency's nightmare—it offered the average computer user a nontechnical and nonthreatening entry into easy, daily use of cryptography. P.G.P. soon found its way to the Internet, and it quickly spread around the world—making Zimmermann, in the government's view, an exporter of munitions. A grand-jury inquiry began. The computer industry rallied around Zimmermann, and after three years the case was dropped. Zimmermann eventually explained to a Senate committee, "I wrote P.G.P. from information in the open literature.... This technology belongs to everybody." By the mid-nineteen-nineties, the Software Publishers Association was telling journalists that the number of cryptographic products being sold by foreign companies had reached three hundred and forty.

President Clinton and his senior advisers, under pressure from the law-enforcement and national-security communities, tried to compromise on the issue. The export of encryption for computers could go forward, the government said, if the industry agreed to install a government-approved encryption chip, known as the Clipper Chip, that could be directly accessed by law-enforcement officers. Under another proposal, American computer manufacturers would have been permitted to export new encryption products if a spare set of decoding keys were accessible to the government. The proposals, known as key recovery or key escrow, were assailed by privacy proponents, who demanded to know whether the Clinton Administration would have dared to advocate that citizens be required to give the keys to their house or safety-deposit box to a third person.

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The cultural divide between Fort Meade and Silicon Valley was widening. The agency's senior managers were unable to comprehend what every programmer and researcher in academia and industry intuitively understood: encryption could not be stopped. The managers had ample warning. In 1991, a secret study predicted that the use of encryption would grow exponentially—a prediction largely ignored by the agency's senior management. A former N.S.A. director recalled that in the early nineties he had had a series of conversations with the civilian managers, urging them not to insist on their version of key recovery. "I couldn't believe their proposals," he said, adding that he had warned the managers that, given the public's attitude toward privacy, key recovery "could not work if the government held the key. They were so arrogant. They knew all there was to know."

"Export control is a legitimate concern to the agency," one former senior official told me, but the issue made the top managers "paralyzed and afraid to move into the future." He and many colleagues had argued for a two-prong approach—continuing to do all that was possible to maintain export controls while also planning for a fully encrypted world. The agency's long fight against encryption delayed its widespread use by many years, but the agency's senior managers spent those years "holding on to what we have today" instead of seeking ways to lessen encryption's impact. The official lamented, "We were squandering time" while continuing to make more enemies inside the computer industry.

Today, the encryption fight is all but over. The Commerce Department is scheduled to issue new export regulations on December 15th that, many experts believe, will permit American computer companies to include advanced cryptography, with fewer restrictions, on equipment sold worldwide. "We've won," Phil Zimmermann told me, jubilantly. "And they tried to put me in prison! Now we can export strong crypto and they can't stop us. We can do whatever we wish."

The N.S.A.'s short-term solution to the encryption dilemma has been to urge the C.I.A. to go back to the world of dirty tricks and surreptitious entry. According to a 1996 congressional staff study, the next century will require a clandestine agency that "breaks into or otherwise gains access to the contents of secured facilities, safes and computers" and "steals, compromises and influences foreign cryptographic capabilities so as to make them exploitable" by the N.S.A.

Such information theoretically could help Washington's policymakers disrupt future terrorist activity, intercept illicit shipments of nuclear arms, or uncover acts of espionage against American defense corporations. Unfortunately, several C.I.A. officers I spoke with found the proposal too ambitious. One retired case officer told me that while he was on a clandestine assignment years ago in the Third World, "I was designated to get a certain black box. I worked on it for three and a half years, and I got nowhere. If I had worked on it for ten years, and with a true stroke of luck, I might have gotten within ten feet of it." Another retired operations officer, similarly skeptical of the C.I.A.'s chances of obtaining cryptological intelligence, told me that sometimes the clandestine operatives in the field have to report back, "This is too hard."

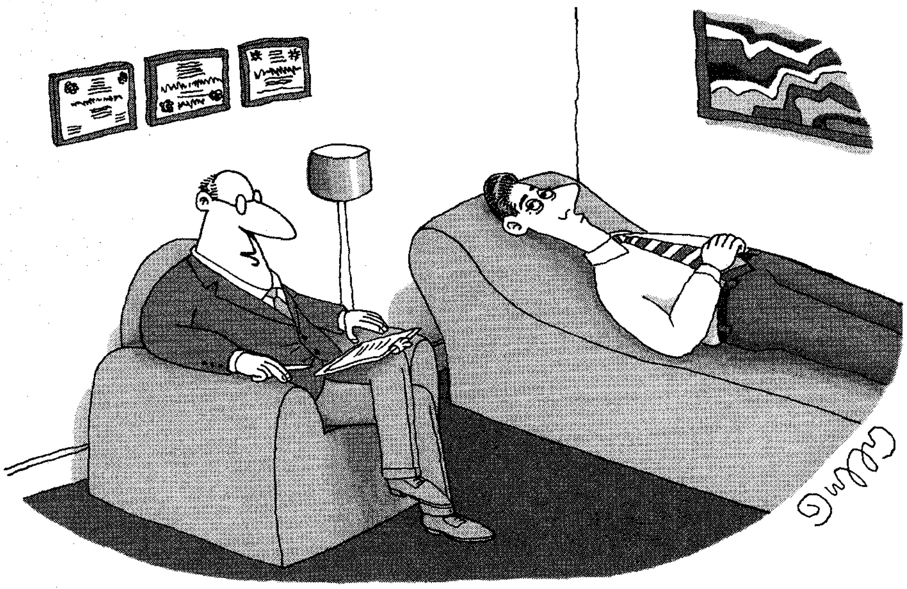
MANY Americans, of course, are deeply distrustful of the N.S.A.—a view reflected in recent Hollywood movies like "Enemy of the State" and "Mercury Rising." The traditional American belief in privacy and constitutional protection is at odds with a superspy agency capable of monitoring unencrypted telephone conversations and E-mail exchanges anywhere in the world. Abuses have occurred. In the nineteen-seventies, the Senate intelligence committee revealed that the agency had systematically violated the law by surveilling American citizens, including more than twelve hundred antiwar and civil-rights activists. The revelations led to a public outcry and to the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which made monitoring of American targets illegal without a warrant from a special federal court. (The court rarely turns down such requests from the government.) The act, and a supporting executive order, set rules for the handling of intercepts or other intelligence involving Americans who were overheard or picked up in the course of legitimate foreign surveillance.

The N.S.A.'s bitter fight over encryption, with its tell-all computer chips and key-recovery proposals, has renewed longstanding fears that one of the agency's satellite-data collection programs, code-named ECHELON, is routinely collecting and analyzing unencrypted telephone conversations and Internet chatter around the world. ECHELON was launched, in the mid-nineteen-seventies, to spy on Soviet satellite communications. "Imagine," the BBC exclaimed last month—one of hundreds of such reports in the past ten years—"a global spying network that can eavesdrop on every single phone call, fax, or E-mail, anywhere on the planet. It sounds like science fiction, but it's true." The agency does routinely collect vast amounts of digital data, and it is capable of targeting an individual telephone line or computer terminal in many places around the world. But active and retired N.S.A. officials have repeatedly told me that the agency does not yet have the software to make sense out of more than a tiny fraction of the huge array of random communications that are collected. If the agency *were* able to filter through the traffic, the officials noted, international terrorists like Osama bin Laden would not be able to remain in hiding. The fact is that ECHELON, far from being one of the N.S.A.'s secret weapons, as some believe, is viewed as a fiscal black hole by the Senate and House intelligence committees.

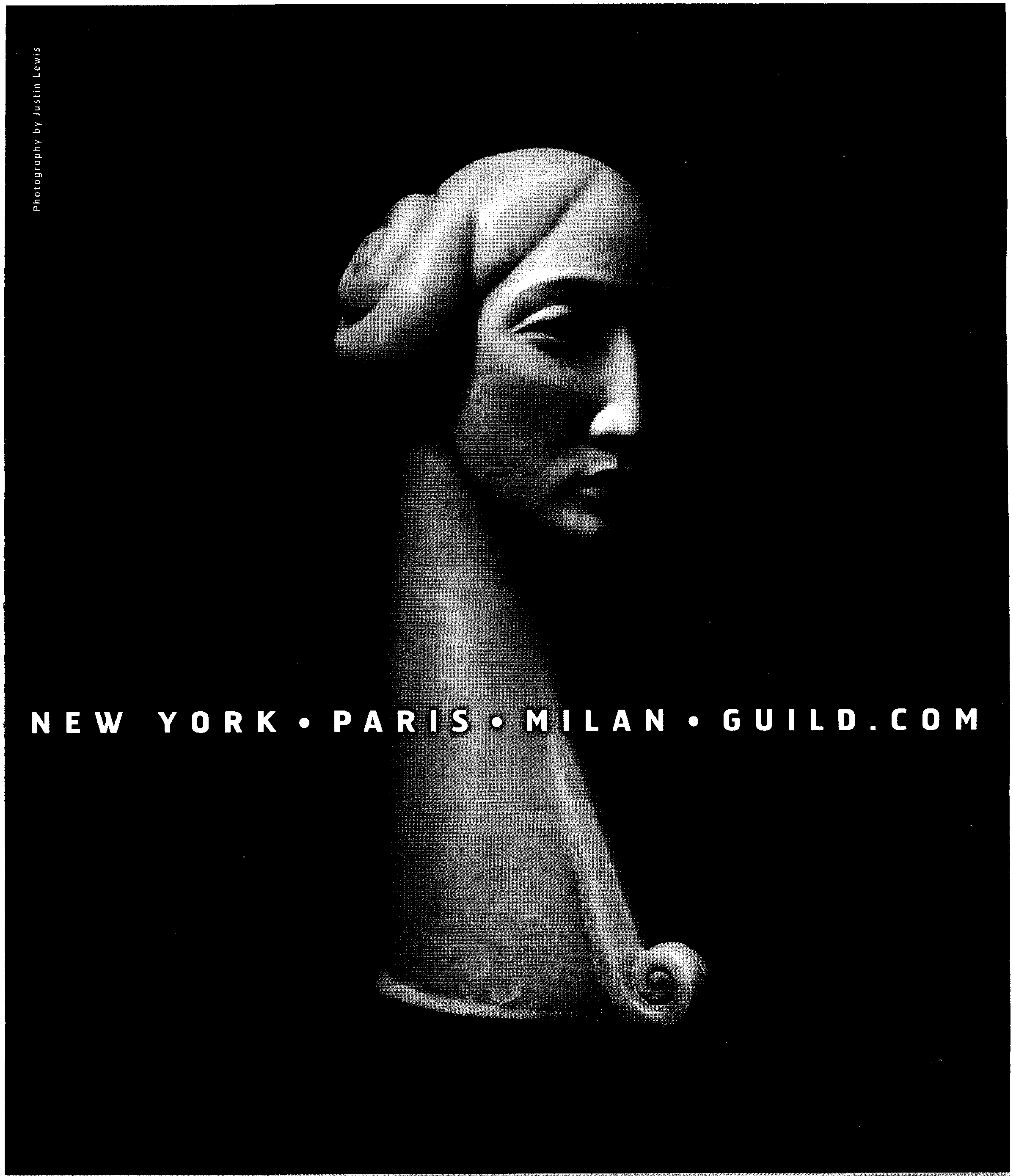
John Millis, in his private talk to the retired C.I.A. agents, complained that the United States was spending "incredible amounts of money" on satellite collection. "It threatens to overwhelm the intelligence budget." Using satellites to sweep up communications indiscriminately, he said, "doesn't make a lot of sense. . . . You shouldn't be spending one more dollar than we do to try and intercept communications from space." Millis's point was that the data collected from sate lites, like the data collected from the Internet, cannot be sorted or analyzed in any meaningful way.

THE agency's critics, in and out of the government, told me that they see a glimmer of hope for the N.S.A. in the appointment, last May, of Lieutenant General Michael Hayden as its new director. Hayden, who joined the Air Force after earning a master's degree in American history at Duquesne University, in Pittsburgh, has been praised for his intelligence and open-mindedness. "Hayden gets it," one intelligence-committee aide told me. "But he's parachuted in there, and faced with a deputy director whose job is to foil what the director wants to do. There's no question that it's the hardest job in the intelligence community. He's got to manage a multibillion-dollar corporation that has a blue-collar mentality."

General Hayden's initial goal will be to convince Congress and the White House that he can do what his predecessors did not—develop a specific



"I'll say a normal word, then you say the first sick thing that pops into your head."



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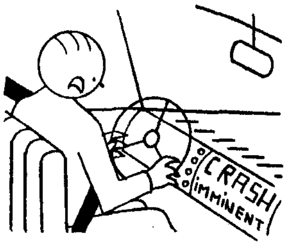
management plan and a budget for analyzing intelligence from the Internet and other digital sources. “We’ve criticized the N.S.A. for not having a well-coördinated strategy,” one legislative aide told me, “but we’re not in a position to tell them where to go.” The issues, of course, are highly technical, and it’s not clear that more money—even billions of dollars—will get the job done. The amount of data flowing through the Internet is growing exponentially, and skilled computer scientists are at a premium. The agency’s war against encryption has left a legacy of bitterness throughout the computer industry, and today’s technical advances are taking place not at Fort Meade but on university campuses and in corporation laboratories across America. Those computer whizzes who might have been attracted to high-level government work are instead being attracted by the far higher pay scales offered by private industry.



There also is little evidence that President Clinton and his national-security team view the agency’s signals-intelligence plight as significant. This year’s classified Defense Department budget request included a boost of nearly two hundred million dollars for the agency, with the funds earmarked for long-range research into signals intelligence. The money never made it through the White House’s Office of Management and Budget, however. “George Tenet didn’t support it,” a former congressional aide explained. A similar secret request, for four hundred million dollars or more to modify the Jimmy Carter, a Seawolf-class nuclear submarine, for top-secret agency intelligence work, was approved—evidence that the White House believes that more covert operations will solve the nation’s coming intelligence problems.

Hayden also will have to contend with those, in and out of the government, who remain dubious about the N.S.A. One firm skeptic is the encryption expert Whitfield Diffie, who is now at Sun Microsystems. Diffie, a leading advocate of computer privacy, was quick to suggest that the current alarm in the N.S.A. may be a self-interested ruse. When I brought up the N.S.A.’s problems with new technology, he replied, “What bothers me is that you are saying what the agency *wants* us to believe—they used to be great, but these days they have trouble reading the newspaper, the Internet is too complicated for them, there is so much traffic and they can’t find what they want. It *may* be true, but it is what they have been ‘saying’ for years. It’s convenient for N.S.A. to have its targets believe it is in trouble. That doesn’t mean it isn’t in trouble, but it is a reason to view what spooky inside informants say with skepticism.”

Shortly after his appointment, Hayden assembled a group of highly regarded mid-level managers and gave them free rein to evaluate the agency. He also began a series of meetings, outside Fort Meade, to get independent advice. The evaluations were consistently “brutal,” according to one official, in terms of the ongoing management problems. On November 15th, Hayden announced to the N.S.A. workforce that he was beginning what he called One Hundred Days of Change. The next day, he made his move against the establishment. He dissolved the agency’s leadership structure, despite a bitter protest from Barbara McNamara, and announced the formation of a five-member executive group, under his leadership, which would be responsible for decision-making.

LAST month, General Hayden agreed to speak to me, at his unpretentious top-floor offices at Ops 2, the N.S.A. headquarters building. He is an affable spymaster, who laughs easily, offers no slogans, and promises no quick fixes for the agency’s problems. He seemed to understand that his new troops—computer gurus and mathematicians—are unlike any others he had commanded before.

When I brought up the agency’s long-standing war against the export of encryption, Hayden quickly dismissed it as yesterday’s lost battle. He also took issue with those who criticized Barbara McNamara and other civilian managers for their failure to anticipate the communications upheaval. “Barbara McNamara has been a good deputy to me,” he said. “But I make the decisions.”

Hayden emphasized that the personnel problems are far less significant than the technological ones: “The issue is not people but external changes. For the N.S.A., technology is a two-edged sword. If technology in the outside world races away from us—at breakneck speed—our mission is more difficult. It can be our enemy.”

When I asked Hayden about the agency’s capability for unwarranted spying on private citizens—in the unlikely event, of course, that the agency could somehow get the funding, the computer scientists, and the knowledge to begin making sense out of the Internet—his response was heated. “I’m a kid from Pittsburgh with two sons and a daughter who are closet libertarians,” he said. “I am not interested in doing anything that threatens the American people, and threatens the future of this agency. I can’t emphasize enough to you how careful we are. We *have* to be so careful—to make sure that America is never distrustful of the power and security we can provide.”

General Hayden made no effort to minimize his agency’s plight. During the Cold War, he said, the N.S.A. was “technologically more adept than our adversary. Now it’s harder to predict where America’s interests will need to be in the future.” His goal in the near future, he added, speaking carefully, is to determine which of the agency’s past practices are applicable to today’s high-tech world—“and which of them may be counterproductive.”

“A lot of the choices are Sophie’s choices,” he said. “The trade-off is between modernization” (recruiting computer scientists and beginning long-range programs to tackle the Internet) “and readiness”—that is, meeting the hectic operational needs of the Defense Department and the White House for immediate intelligence. “We have a high ops tempo,” he added, “but choices have to be made.” In other words, he made clear, some ongoing N.S.A. intelligence-collection programs will have to be curtailed, or eliminated, so that funds are available for futuristic research.

“In its forty-year struggle against Soviet Communism,” Hayden noted, “the N.S.A. was thorough, stable, and focussed.” Then he asked “What’s changed?” and he answered, “All of that.” ♦

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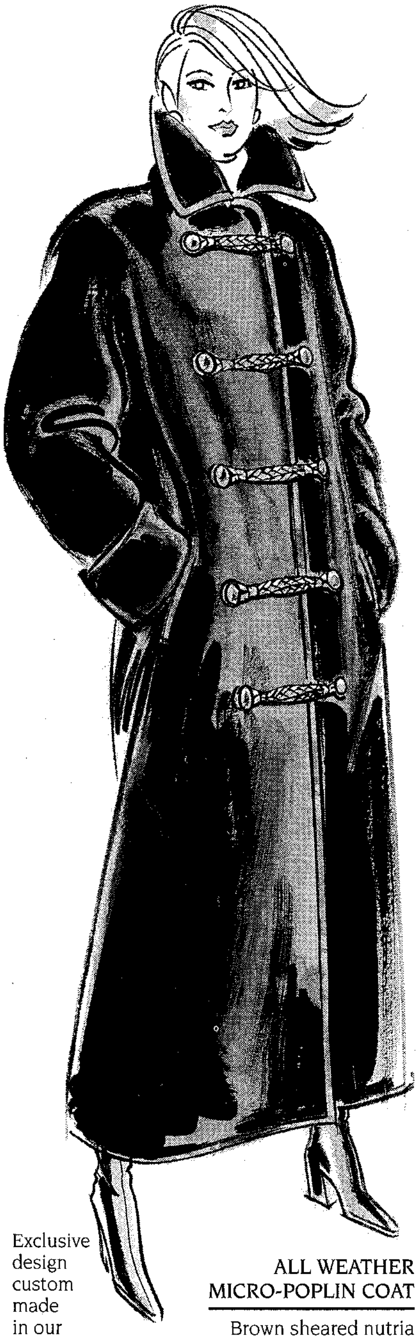

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PROFILE

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE

How an inventor gets his best ideas.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

DAVID LEVY is an inventor. It is only recently that he began introducing himself as such, at the risk of appearing freakish or delusional, and he does so mostly, he admits, because he now has nothing else to say. In the past, he could say that he was a graduate student at M.I.T. or an engineer at Apple. Now, having boldly shed the last of his institutional affiliations and ventured naked into the world, he has no choice but to look his interlocutor in the eye and wait for the yelp: "An inventor!" "People think I live in a fantasy world," he says. "I do live in a fantasy world, but a rational fantasy world." A little later on in the conversation, once Levy has established that his inventions have become actual products and he is not living off a trust fund, the confidences begin. "I hear a lot of toilet ideas," he says. "Things that heat toilet seats, things that automatically lower toilet seats. A lot of golf ideas, too. Golf and toilet seats are actually the most patented areas in general." He pauses for a moment. "It must be because both are common to the human experience," he says thoughtfully. "Except golf."

To date (he is thirty-six years old), Levy has invented an eclectic array of products, including a tiny keypad, smaller than a credit card, whose keys can be pressed with a full-sized finger (it may become the design of choice for E-mail-sending cell phones); a TV remote control embedded in a football; a tattoo whose design may be changed at will, like an electronic display; and a device that seals severed arteries in one minute. He was largely responsible for the design of the PowerBook: he was the one who persuaded Apple to replace the trackball with a trackpad, and move the keyboard from the front of the laptop to the back, allowing for typing in cramped spaces like airplane seats. Comfort and convenience are his watchwords. What is it about some devices, he wonders—the paper clip, the Post-it Note—that meshes so perfectly with fingers and expectations that they become icons? And what is it about others—personal computers, suitcases—that makes them perpetual sources of confusion and distress? "When I lie in bed, I try to think of things that suck," he says. "Never dismiss a problem because it seems impossible to solve. Make the bold assumption that anything and everything will one day be better. Your job as an inventor is to make it so."

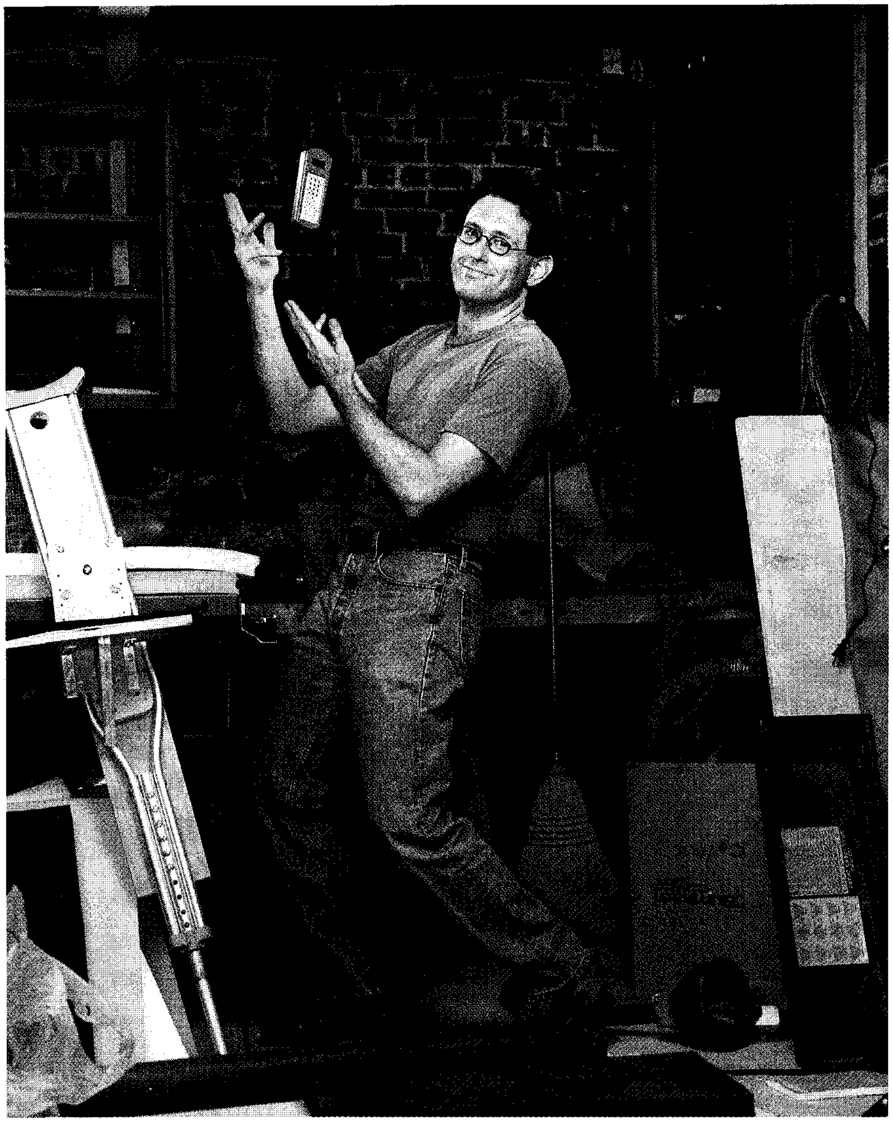
Inventing is a sensual business—Levy spends his days envisioning bodies and objects in a variety of pleasurable and painful relationships to one another—but he also extends his inventing into the less tangible territory of his emotional life. Some of his efforts at life design are even written on a whiteboard next to his desk, mixed in with his master list of professional projects. "Dayfriends" is one such item. Most of his friends work during the day, and sometimes he gets lonely and wishes that he knew someone to have lunch with; "Dayfriends" is his plan to organize a group of people who work at home. "Vacation," located about three-quarters of the way down the list, is a reminder to take a vacation once the inventions noted above it have been attended to.

When Levy has just thought of a new idea, he shouts out loud, but most of the time he seems to be not so much projecting his personality forth as leaning back against it. Though he isn't large, he has about him the assured, physical presence of one who is familiar with bodies, combined with the recessed calm of someone who spends a lot of time alone. His clothes are so clearly selected for comfort rather than style that they seem inside out, as though the marked surface were not the outer, on view, but the inner, touching the skin.

Every now and then, an idea will simply present itself, a gift from the blue, but most of the time inventing is seduction. Levy does not wait for inspiration: he wheedles it, flirts with it, hunts it. For a year or so, around 1990, he made a practice of lying in bed every Saturday morning, forbidding himself to get up until he'd thought of something new. These days, he finds his stimulation in shops. One recent morning, he drove to a C.V.S. drugstore near his house, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A drugstore is Levy's temple, for there are found the great inventions—toothbrush! soap! nail clippers!—that distinguish civilization from barbarism. It was dark and cold that morning, raining hard (Levy was wearing his Timberland parka), but inside the C.V.S. it was warm and bright, and, in Levy's eyes, each shelf glinted with potential. "Whenever there is time wasted, or discomfort, or unpleasantness," he said, raising an index finger to mark the mantra, "there is opportunity."

"Pet hair," he remarked, spotting a shelf of bones and leashes. "Hair is a big pet issue, and no one's thought of a good way to avoid being coated in it." Moving on to the razor section, he stroked his cheek thoughtfully and recalled a period in his life that he spent smearing his face with hair-removal creams, in a vain effort to break into the lucrative shaving market from a new angle. "Here's another problem that hasn't been addressed correctly," he said, pointing to a mop display. "How to clean a floor. Sponges are gross. There's no way to rinse them properly, and they start crumbling into little pieces and chunks fall off."

Strolling through the dental aisle, Levy paused to admire a toothpaste dispenser. "This toothpaste pump is the cleanest system I've ever seen," he said, picking it up. "Tubes are a mess and they're ugly. This pump is not a mess and it's cool-looking." His attention was arrested for a moment by a two-headed toothbrush whose heads faced each other as though locked in combat, like a visual pun on the word "bristle." "Ah—you can brush the front and back of your teeth at the same time, and they've added a tongue scraper," he mused, fingering the device. He stepped back and surveyed the vista of small plastic objects before him: a litter of dental-floss holders, gum pokers, and toothbrushes both mechanical and electric. "Two-thirds of this aisle is toothbrushes," he said. "You see that, and you see dollars. Plus, toothbrushes are that rare combination: both disposable and expensive. This is such a heavily picked-over market that the odds of coming up with a new toothbrush function are small. But if you can get out of the toothbrush metaphor completely—if you can come up with a whole new paradigm of teeth cleaning"—he paused and smiled to himself—"then you're a billionaire. That's what I spend time thinking about."



"When I lie in bed, I try to think of things that suck," Levy says. "Never dismiss a problem because it seems impossible to solve." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

SABA

Rounding a corner, Levy came upon the hair department. "Look at all these hairbrushes," he said in wonder. "Cylinders, rounds, rectangles, spheres." Levy's own hair is tangled and curly, and looks as though it's usually left to take care of itself. For a moment, he was distracted by an alarming device that might have furnished a flesh-tearing weapon for a medieval person: a metal ball sprouting long spikes, attached to a handle. "Here's another inventing method," he said, after looking over the hairbrushes and failing to detect why a person would buy one kind rather than another. "Make a list of every possible way a product could be designed, and figure out what hasn't been done. You could go down the Euclidean list of geometric shapes, or the list of physical implementations: mechanical, thermal, chemical, electronic, and electromagnetic. Generally, products start off mechanical and end up electromagnetic—think of the phonograph ending up as a CD player. Is it possible to imagine an electromagnetic hairbrush? Maybe you could build a bonnet that would ionize your hair so it could be manipulated by electromagnetic fields. Maybe a hundred years from now you'll put something on your head, scroll down a menu of hair styles, and there you'll have your hair for the day."

Levy entered another aisle. "Now, here's a dying industry—blank tapes." It was, indeed, a sorry sight: ten or fifteen video- and audiocassettes, squeezed into a few inches of shelf between magazines and batteries. "Do you remember how long this aisle used to be five years ago?" Levy asked. "Ten feet at least. Why has it shrunk to this? I don't know. I don't know why people don't want to record TV programs anymore. But Peelables died because of this." Peelables was a product that Levy came up with in 1990, consisting of a set of blank-tape or computer-disk labels stuck one on top of another. (Instead of searching for a new label you would peel off the old and find a new one underneath.) "I missed the window on blank tapes and computer disks," Levy says sadly. "If Peelables had been around three years earlier, there would be a lot of things labelled with them now." What irritates him is that this time lag was mostly his fault. Peelables was the first invention he tried seriously to market, and, owing to new-inventor paranoia, he wasted almost two years barking up a series of badly selected industrial trees. "I made a list of hundreds of people in different industries and spent hours and hours talking to them," he says. "The whole time I was trying to avoid 3M, because I saw it as a product company that made Post-it Notes, and would see Peelables as competition. But 3M sees itself as a materials company: it sells gluey paper, and it wants to sell as much of it as possible. I thought they were my enemy. I was wrong. 3M was my friend."

He will not make the same mistake again. Now nervously aware of the vital importance of timing, he is determined to seize the right moment to launch his miniature keyboard, which is likely to be his most profitable invention so far. And that moment, he feels, has come. After all, most current models of E-mail-sending cell phones have a keypad like that of a regular phone, requiring many tedious button-pushes for some letters. Levy's keyboard gives each letter its own key, and, because the keys are raised up on little mounds, they are easy to press without touching a neighboring key by accident. (Levy researched finger size by fingerprinting fifty men on the platform of the Harvard Square subway station.) The numbers and punctuation marks are placed in the spaces between the raised letters. Levy knows that his keyboard is better than any currently on the market, and he feels it is, at last, so close to success that he can almost smell it. "Ericsson just released a product called Chatboard," he announced excitedly one day over the phone. "I don't think it's in the United States yet, but kids in Europe use it to send E-mail over cell phones, and last month *two billion messages were sent.* This is what I've been waiting for."

In addition to his drugstore expeditions, Levy has come up with several other ways to systematize the inventive process. The Curse Method, for instance. "Whenever someone curses, it's a sign to invent something," he says. His bike-seat lock, the Wedgie, which he licensed to Kryptonite, was a product of the Curse Method: someone walked into Levy's lab one day yelling abuse at the thief of his bicycle seat, and thereafter Levy noticed that Cambridge

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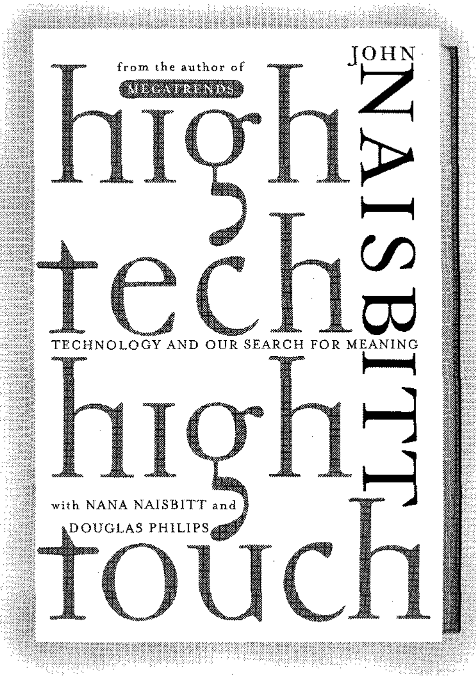
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sidewalks were full of bicycles without seats and set about solving the problem. Levy also employs what he calls the Party Method, which involves engaging a person in conversation about the problems of his profession. Levy's artery-sealing device originated in a conversation he had, over cocktails, with a surgeon who complained about the difficulties of suturing blood vessels. Employment of the Party Method is a delicate business, however. "I don't want to give someone an idea that he'll go off and work on without me," Levy says. "I say whatever it takes to distract him from thinking, Hey, maybe this is a big opportunity."

Another inventing technique Levy uses—one especially conducive to lying in bed, which is how he likes to work—is the Fantasy Method. "For any particular problem, first you ignore physical laws and just decide what would be the best possible way for the world to be," he says. "Then move backward, step by step, from the ideal world back into reality." The key to correct employment of the Fantasy Method, he cautions, is not to become so enamored of your more eccentric visions that you become lost in crazy-land. "Inventors are thought of as dopey because they come up with stuff that has no connection to reality," Levy says. "But the fact is, their reality is different. Most people's reality is a little narrower, so they don't see its potential. I have many, many ideas and most of them are stupid. The really weird ones come and go fairly quickly, but I'd say that once a day I realize that time travel would be a good thing, or that a device that defeated gravity would be pretty useful."

The Edgerton Shop at M.I.T., in Building 44, is filled with big, dumb, heavy, iron machines that do three things to metal: cut it along a line, drill circular holes in it, and bend it. The machines, though built around 1960, have a Model T-era look to them, as though taken from a factory scene in a Charlie Chaplin movie. In one corner of the shop stands a control panel barnacled with gauges and handles and labelled "Must Never Be Used." One morning, Levy arrived at this shop to begin work on a tent. A Chinese-owned company had come to him with a problem: a competitor had begun marketing a highly profitable tent, and the

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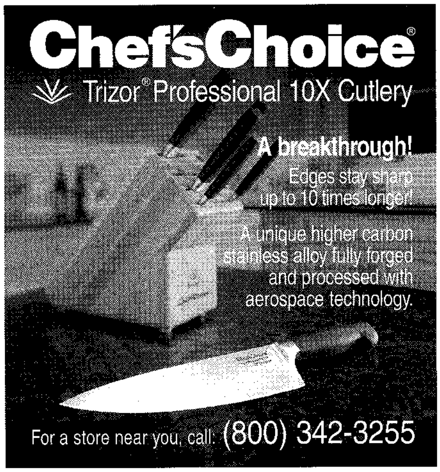
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company wanted Levy to come up with something better.

The previous week, he had driven to Home Depot and bought several long aluminum channels. He carried these over to a band saw and fed them through the machine's blade, cutting each into nine small sections. Then, sections in hand, he walked over to an ancient filing cabinet in a corner of the room, whose many drawers contained all sorts of small fixtures—steel washers, lock washers, brass washers, steel nuts, stove bolts.

Levy stared at the washers and the bolts and considered his next move. The problem to be solved was this: he needed to attach the small sections he had just cut to long lengths of square pipe (which would later become the tent's legs), but he needed to keep the hollow insides of the pipes free from screws and other impediments because he intended to insert a spring inside them, which required freedom of movement. He could conceivably weld the two together, but welding aluminum was a difficult process and he wanted to avoid it. After two minutes' thought, he had it. "Once you think of something, it's always so obvious," he mumbled. He would use screws after all, but short ones in the corners of the square pipes, where they wouldn't impede the movement of the round spring.

Levy working on a tent looks like such a practical, hammer-and-nails sort of guy that he seems to have nothing to do with the cartoon inventor—unwashed and wild-eyed, never leaving his basement, setting off explosions. It's true, Levy is no Dr. Frankenstein, and one would think that he differed from the crackpot in the shrewd limitation of his vision—in the fact that he pursues comfort and convenience rather than jousting with the laws of nature. In fact, though, the late-twentieth-century crackpot is characterized not by outlandish ambition but by a weird banality. Wandering the aisles of an event such as the annual Yankee Invention Exposition (held every October in Waterbury, Connecticut), you become aware of how complex a matter it can be to distinguish genuine inventing opportunity from problems that just do not need to be solved. This year's Yankee Expo exhibits included the SURE SHOT, a urinal that attaches to a toilet-seat cover; the SuperVisor, a baseball cap with a small mirror attached to its brim which enables close inspection of one's teeth and face without removal of one's hat; a plastic utensil rest named the Neater-Eater; and a plastic cylinder named Poppacker, a receptacle for a two-litre soda bottle designed to be placed in a cooler so that, when the bottle is temporarily removed, ice and other items do not fall into the space it occupied, making replacement difficult. (This is not to say that amateur inventors don't fit the crackpot profile in other ways. *Inventors' Digest*, which caters to this population as well as to more professional types, recently ran an article offering such advice to exhibitors as "Bathe before the show" and "Bring—and use—breath mints.")

Levy's worst idea to date has at least a certain lunatic grandeur. The idea, a kind of dog diaper, had its origin in his horror at the pooper-scooper law. Levy himself has never owned a dog, but he found it gross and humiliating that a dog owner should be compelled to pick up after his pet in such a repellently unmediated manner. He proposed to attach a clasp to the top of the dog's tail from which would hang a small plastic bag—"a feed bag in reverse," as an acquaintance of his put it. He had been told by dog owners that a dog would attempt to remove the bag, so he added to the clasp a bed of spikes that would cause considerable pain if the dog rebelled. Eventually, he reasoned, the dog would learn that his own scratching was the cause of his pain, and leave the diaper to do its work.

It is not, then, an unerring product sense that distinguishes Levy from the crackpot. Rather, it is the methodical way that he lays bait for inspiration, and his respect for the requirements of the market. Levy is a common-sense sort. He feels little nostalgia for the Promethean inventor figure, half madman, half genius. His heroes (such as Ivan Sutherland, who, in the nineteen-sixties, was the first person to draw pictures on a computer, thus inventing computer graphics, and who befriended Levy when he was twelve) are all people he has known. And actually, with his productivity and his businesslike attitude, Levy is not out of place among his peers. Independent inventors are not common, but they have generated more significant products than you might

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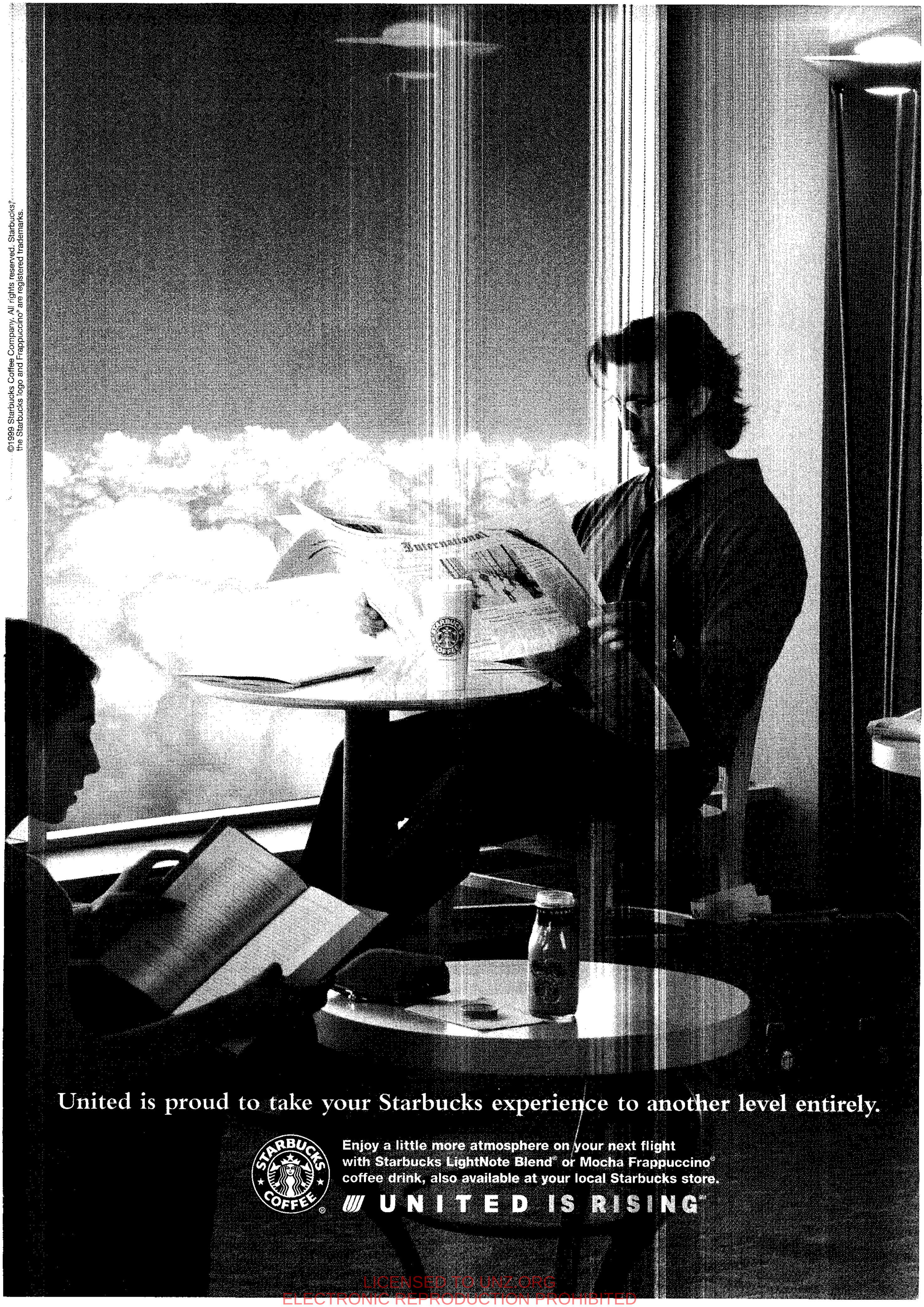
"No, we are not twins."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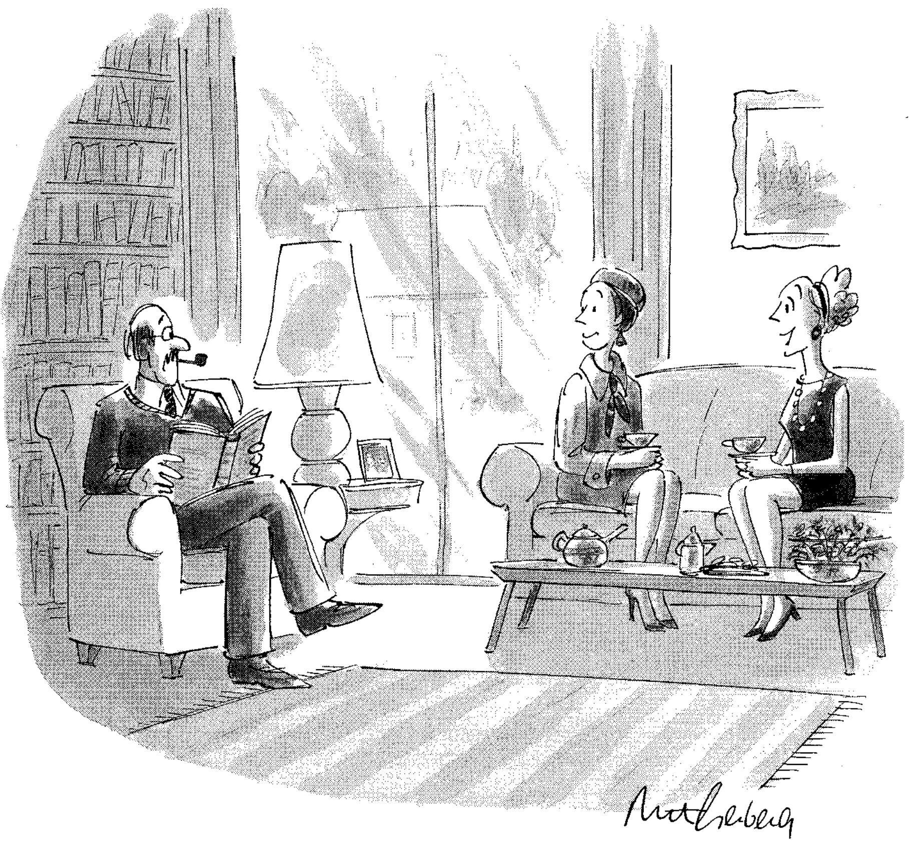

"It was just that one time that you won the Nobel Prize, wasn't it, dear?"

• •

think, even recently: Beanie Babies, the computer mouse, Kitty Litter, Odor-Eaters. Perhaps the genuinely deranged crackpot is now extinct. A couple of years ago, for Hanukkah, Levy's mother presented him with a book about inventors past. "I turn to the first chapter," Levy says, "and it's about some inventor in the eighteen-eighties who came up with this great idea but a company stole it from him and he died destitute. That was sort of sad, so I started reading about another inventor, from the nineteen-twenties, who also invented some great thing, but then his partner stole it and he ended up committing suicide by putting his head on train tracks. It became funny. Every inventor ended up unhappy, poor, or committing suicide. I was, like, Thanks, Mom, great present."

LEVY'S parents live in Manhattan Beach, in Los Angeles, but when Levy was small they lived a few miles away, in Hawthorne—near South Central L.A. His father was a software engineer who monitored quality control on science satellites for T.R.W. (A sixties-style liberal, he eschewed work on defense projects.) As a small boy, Levy evinced the classic symptoms of the future inventor, rigging up in his bedroom a complicated arrangement of strings and pulleys to enable himself to operate his light switch and open and shut his door without getting out of bed. He didn't get into M.I.T. the first time he tried, and he wanted to go to Europe, so, reckoning that four summer internships in architecture firms had equipped him to be a designer, he took out an ad in a local paper, received two commissions (a second-story addition and a kitchen remodelling), and, in six weeks, made two thousand dollars. Then he closed up shop, bought a ticket to Berlin, and spent the next year hitchhiking around Europe, working as an itinerant juggler and street magician. After graduating from college, he found a job in the research department of Apple. He remembers this time as a golden age: Apple ten years ago was an engineer's paradise. "Money flowed like water," he recalls wistfully. "It was the late eighties, and Apple had a billion dollars in the bank. I was told to take one workday a week to go hiking or drive to the beach—whatever it was that helped me think about the future and the way computing should be."

One day while Levy was at Apple, an inventor named George Gerpheide walked into his office carrying a trackpad that could move a cursor as accurately as a mouse. Levy seized upon it and built a rudimentary model of what would become the PowerBook, Apple's first notebook computer. "I was shocked by what I felt the first time I saw someone using the PowerBook," he says. "It was maybe a month or so after it had come out. I was in an airplane, and I looked across the aisle and there was someone working on one—the first person I'd seen use the computer outside the Apple offices. I watched him use the top button the way I'd intended the top button to be used, and I was completely taken by this, and realized I had to know if this guy was an Apple employee. If he was, I didn't care. So I asked him, Excuse me, do you work for Apple? He said no, and went back to what he was writing. Then I knew that he was just some guy using the PowerBook—and I started to cry. I would never have predicted that—the power of creating a tool that enters someone's life." For Levy, the most thrilling invention is the one that penetrates the deepest. "One of my fantasies as an inventor has always been to meet someone who has inside his body a medical device that I've designed," he says. "What a powerful sensation that would be—the feeling that I'd kept someone alive because I'd had an idea."

Now that he works by himself, Levy no longer tinkers with computers. He still uses the kind of technology he worked with at Apple, but on bodies. Take his changeable tattoo: to create it, he appropriated the idea behind electronic paper and applied it to skin. The tattoo's ink is composed of tiny, clear balls, each of which has inside it two parallel planes of color—say, red and black. Using an electric stylus, you can rotate the balls, so that on the skin surface you see either red (face up) or black (face down) or clear (sideways, so neither plane of color is visible). It's a normal tattoo in the sense that you still inject ink into your skin with a needle, but, instead of drawing a pattern initially, you fill an area with ink—say, five inches square—and then

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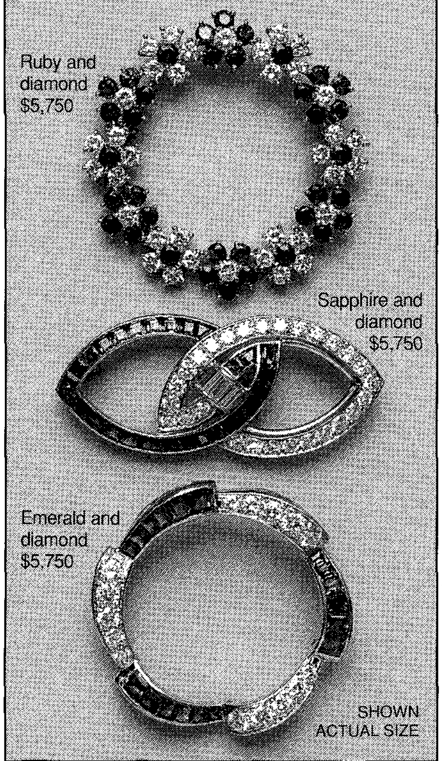

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If he hadn't left Apple when he did, Levy might have become a specialist in computer design. He might have become, in other words, the kind of inventor that is typical now: an expert in a corporate research department who works on a very narrow set of problems, and strives for improvement—faster, smarter, smaller machines—more than innovation. By striking out on his own, Levy converted himself from a person who looked for solutions (to problems defined by his company or the complaining public) to a person who had to look for problems as well. And it is really his ability to define meaty, marketable problems, rather than his mechanical skill in solving them, that makes him a successful inventor. Most people stake out a small corner of the world to criticize, and accept the rest. Levy wanders over wider regions, cultivating the kind of receptive, mobile attention capable of catching itself on flaws or annoyances that usually pass without notice. In the twenties and thirties, inventors characterized their thinking as a kind of free association, and this seems to describe, too, what Levy is doing when he thinks of new ideas: he opens his mind and waits for buried hatreds (dirty sponges, pet hair) to surface.

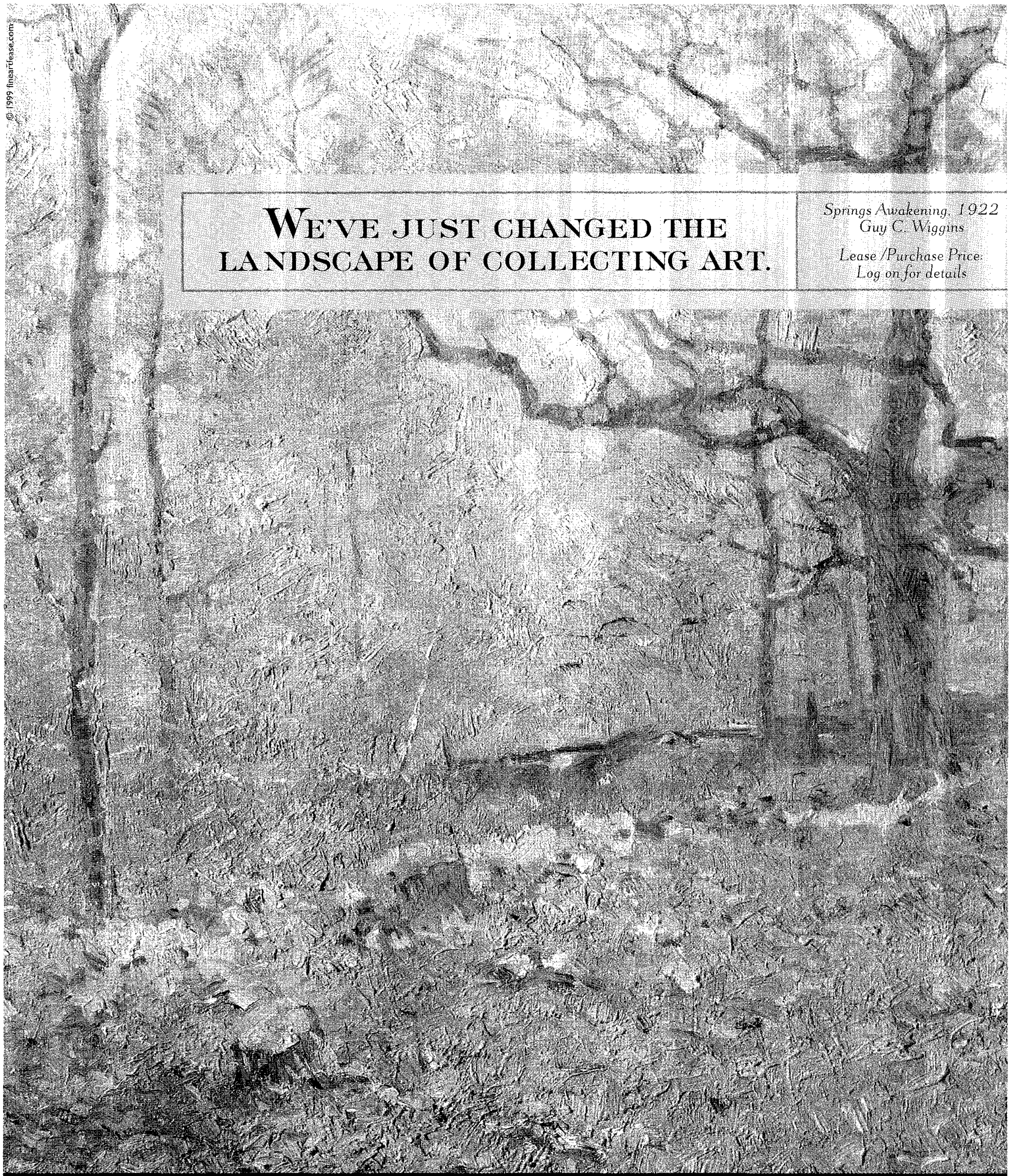
Levy left Apple because he was put in charge of the PowerBook's ergonomics and began working under such high pressure, with a man he hated, that he developed physical symptoms. Since then, he has designed his life with the same attention to comfort that motivates his inventions. He takes himself out for sushi. He drives a Saab convertible. When he moved back to Cambridge from San Francisco, he bought a large clapboard house and converted it from a multifamily home (doing most of the work himself). He sleeps on a special bed he invented, which has a groove at shoulder level that allows a person, by inserting his arm into the groove, to lie with his arms around another person without his lower arm falling asleep.

Levy makes a good living as an inventor (his football TV remote, for example, should earn him some amount in the low six figures), but comfort, to him, seems to have less to do with money than with living exactly as he pleases, without committing himself to behaving in a predictable manner. In September, a friend called him up and offered him a free trip to Singapore if he left the next morning and delivered a piece of electronic equipment. He said yes, and spent the next two weeks driving around Thailand and camping out in the Malaysian rain forest.

For this reason, inventing is not, for Levy, as risky a profession as it might be for somebody else: it doesn't require him to jeopardize anything he really values. It allows him to work for himself, without an employer or an office, and if he can pull off just one medium-sized success he will be set for life. "One of the things that attracted me to inventing," he says, "was the way that royalty income keeps coming in even while you're not working, which leaves you free to do other things: travel, make sculptures. I want to learn to blow glass someday. I'd like to learn French. Life seems to be full of a lot of balls that you're juggling, and I thought that invention was a way to throw the balls up so high that they wouldn't come down for a long time."

Perhaps Levy's most significant venture into his science of comfort was a decision, made when he was an undergraduate, not to work on projects (such as bridges or cars) that can put people's lives at risk. "Did you see the film 'The Jerk'?" he asks, by way of explanation. "The Steve Martin character invents a pair of glasses that don't fall down your nose. He sells millions of them, but after they've been on the market for a while it turns out they make you cross-eyed, and he ends up destitute and everyone hates him. That's the kind of scenario I worried about. As an engineering student, you're shown all kinds of spectacular disasters in order to convey to you the importance of what you're doing, and you can take away one of two things from that: either you conclude that you'd better do a darn good job or you decide that you don't want to be doing that kind of work at all. I chose not to do it."

SOMETIMES Levy has an idea for an invention involving electronic circuitry too complicated for him to put together. When this happens, he pays a visit to Bob Howatt. Bob Howatt is an expert electrical engineer in his fifties who lives in Bedford, Massachusetts,



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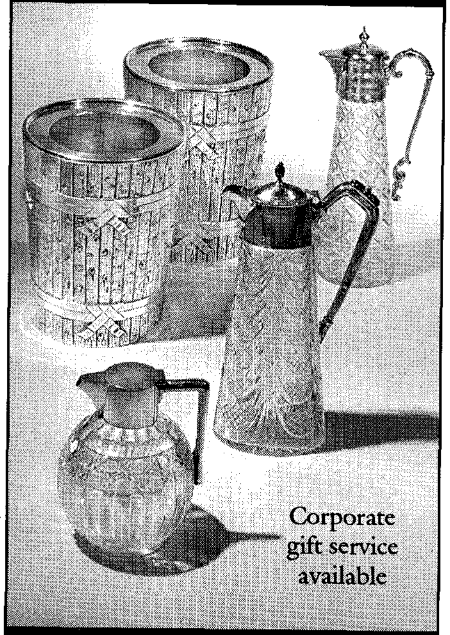

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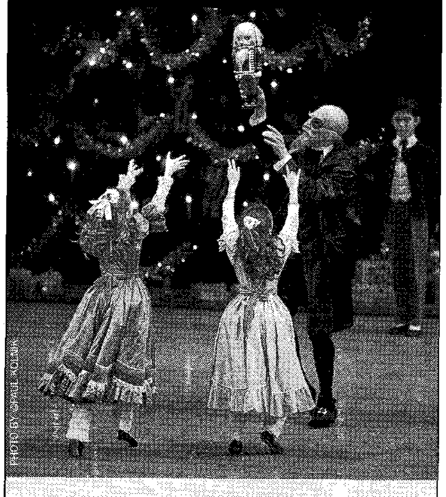

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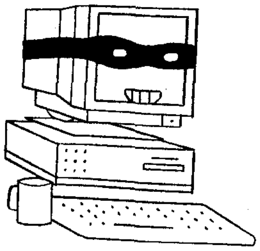
half an hour from Cambridge. One sunny afternoon, Levy climbed into his car, rolled the roof down, and drove out to see him. He dismounted looking especially inventorish, the wind on the highway having whipped his hair up into the bunch-of-celery shape that results when a cartoon character sticks his finger in an electrical socket.

Howatt lives in a little house on a quiet street. The house is dark inside, because Howatt keeps his curtains drawn during the day, and the air is heavy with pipe smoke that lingers and decays, because all the windows are shut. Placed here and there are figures of Garfield the Cat: furry Garfields, plaster Garfields, a loudly ticking Garfield clock. It is the sort of house in which one might expect to come upon human remains or the makings of a mail bomb, though the impression is immediately dispelled by Howatt himself—a gray-haired Geppetto type with silver glasses on the end of his nose.

Levy had come to consult Howatt on the subject of a posture device. He envisioned a piece of cloth, draped over the back of a chair, which, by means of some sort of electrode, would be capable of detecting the posture of the person sitting in the chair. The person would be able to adjust the device to various settings—"ramrod," "relaxed"—and if he slouched down farther than the standard he had set for himself the device would beep and remind him to sit up straight. Levy thought that such a product might appeal to office managers seeking to minimize insurance payments and sick days due to back problems. He wanted Howatt to explain to him the different ways the thing might be constructed and how much each method would cost.



"Are you old enough to remember something called a theremin?" Howatt asked, attempting, in his enthusiasm, to lean forward but finding it awkward from his ergonomic kneeling chair.

"You got me," Levy said.

"A theremin is an electronic musical instrument that was invented in the twenties," he said. "It sounds like a guy playing a saw, and looks like the rabbit ears on an old TV, except they always made them look super zoomy. You play it by waving your hands around—the motion affects the electrical field around the instrument and changes the note it plays. It works like a radio: if you have an AM radio, open up the back and move your hand around inside it and all of a sudden it'll lose track of what station it's on." Howatt thought he could adapt the theremin technology for the posture device by building a sensor that would beep when a person moved around it in a particular way. "The thing I like about the theremin idea," he said, "is that we can steal a maximal amount of technology from somebody else. Especially since I can go down and get a free AM radio with my oil change and build it from that."

"What about clothing?" Levy asked, chewing on his pen. "Will a theremin see clothing?"

"Well, it's all relative," Howatt said. "So as long as the person wears the same clothes every day, he'll be fine." Howatt, dressed in a black-and-green plaid shirt, jeans, and brown suède sneakers, seemed like the kind of person who might wear the same clothes every day. Levy, dressed in a black-and-green plaid shirt, jeans, and brown suède Timberlands, didn't see the variation-of-clothes issue as a problem, either.

"How much would it cost?" Levy asked.

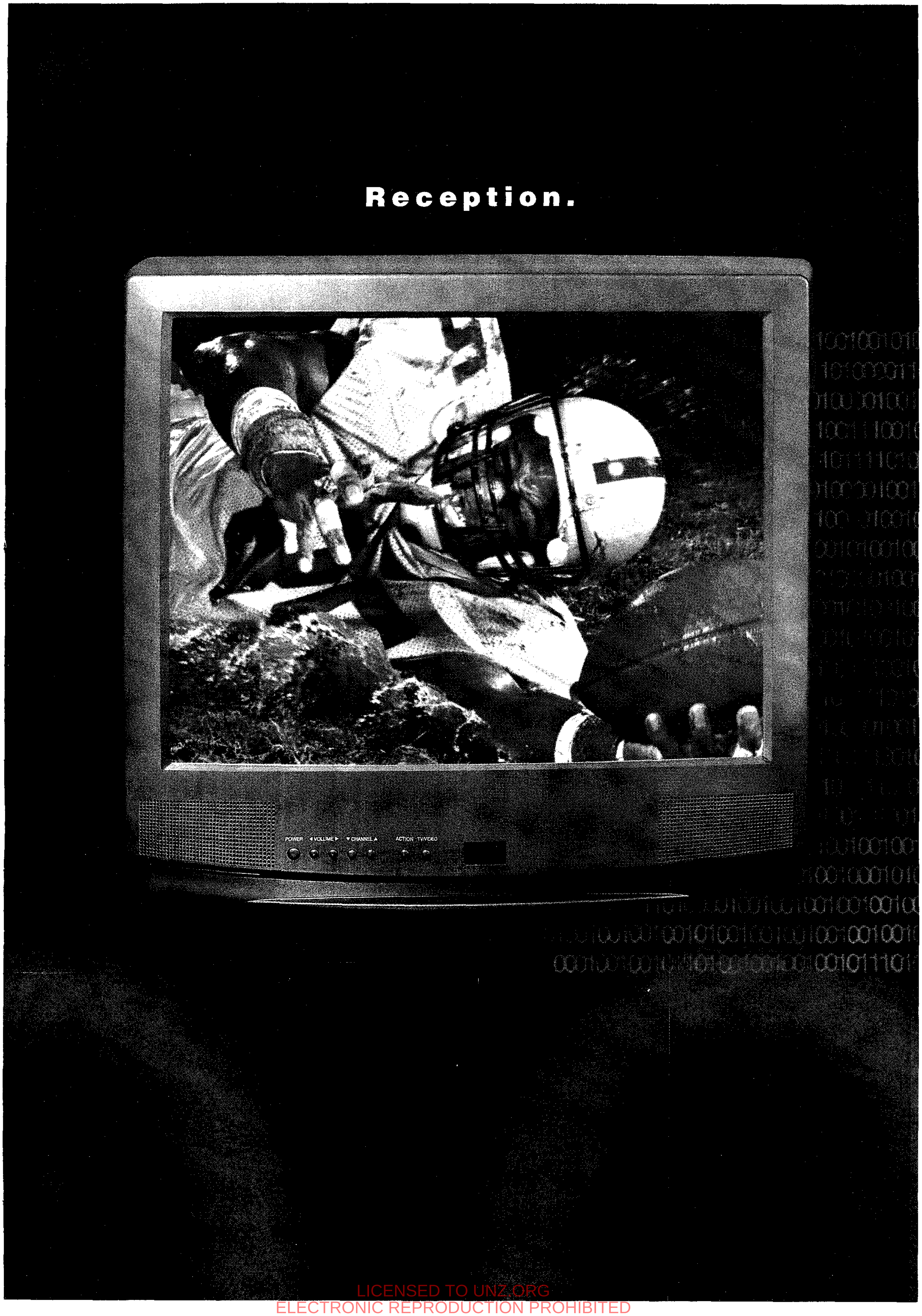
"You always start out by saying it's got to be cheap and then let's look at the method," Howatt complained. "I prefer to figure out how to do it first. You could do it with infrared sensors. You can get them nice and cheap at Radio Shack. And if you really want to be crazy"—here Howatt's eyes opened very wide and his eyebrows moved rapidly up and down—"you could do it with a Life Saver. Did you know that if you snap some flavors of Life Saver they emit a little flash of light?"

"Wintogreen and Pepomint," Levy said.

"And if you could get the person to wear a special shirt . . ."

"No," Levy pleaded, feeling that Howatt's visions were in danger of spiralling out of control. "No special shirt. Now, about the prices."

"Wait a minute, I'm not finished. We could think about microwave, but I don't think the person wants to get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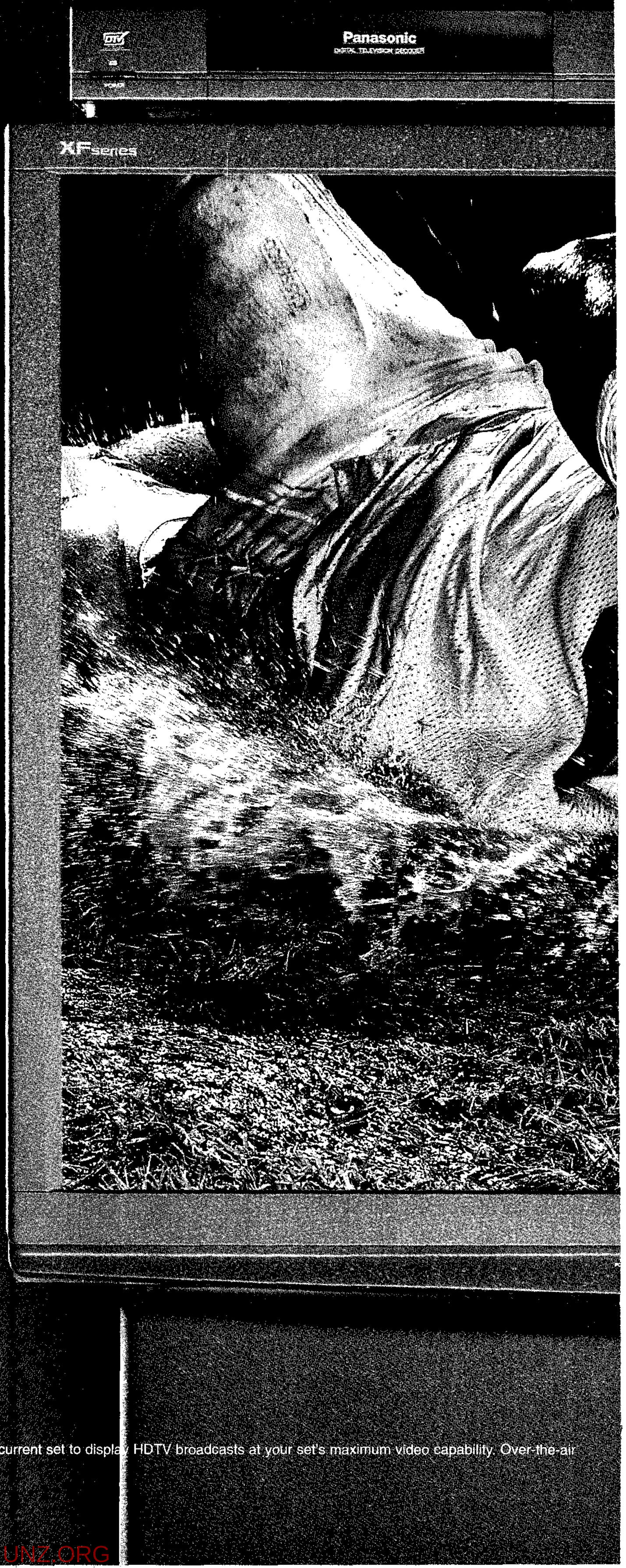

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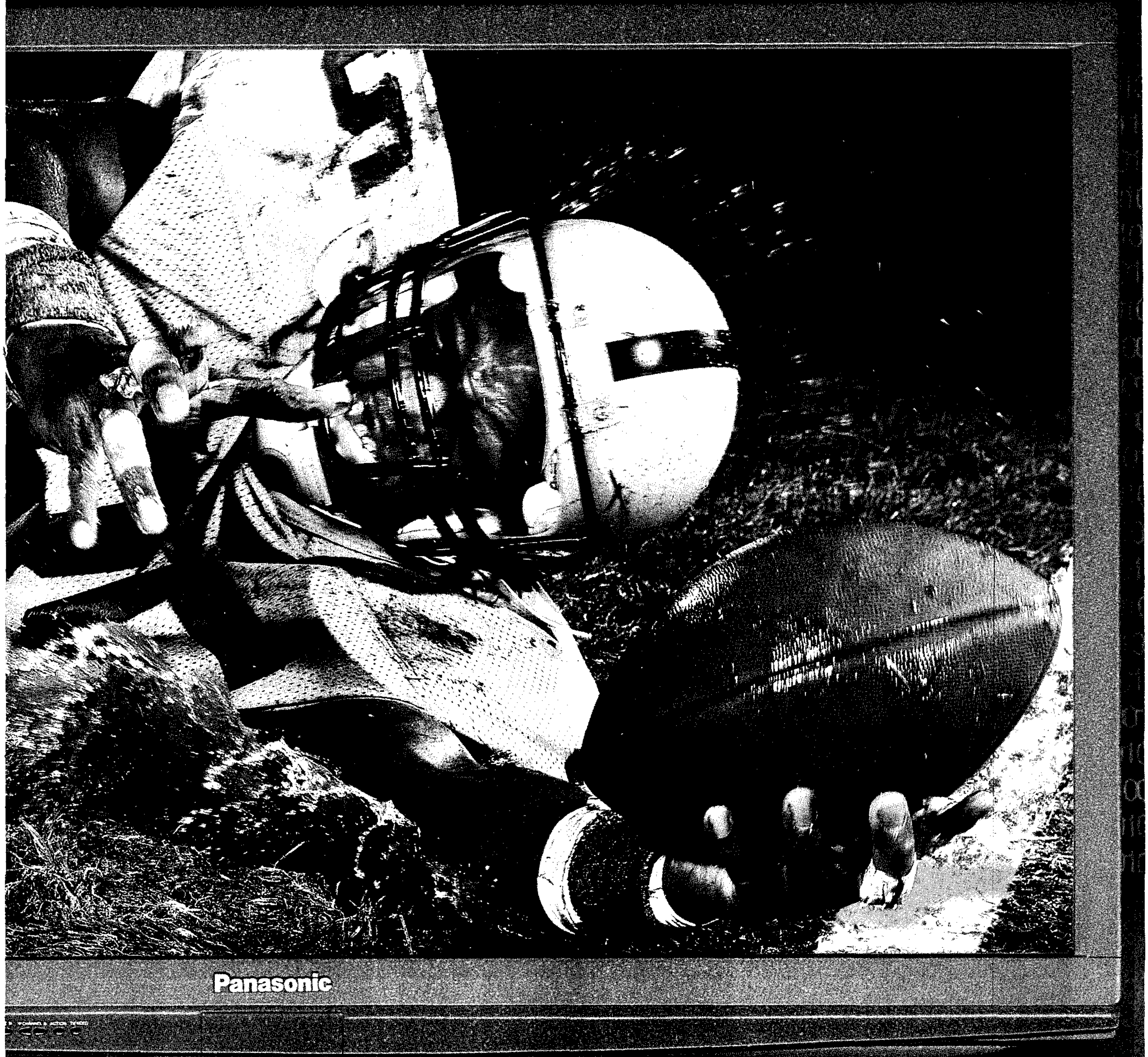

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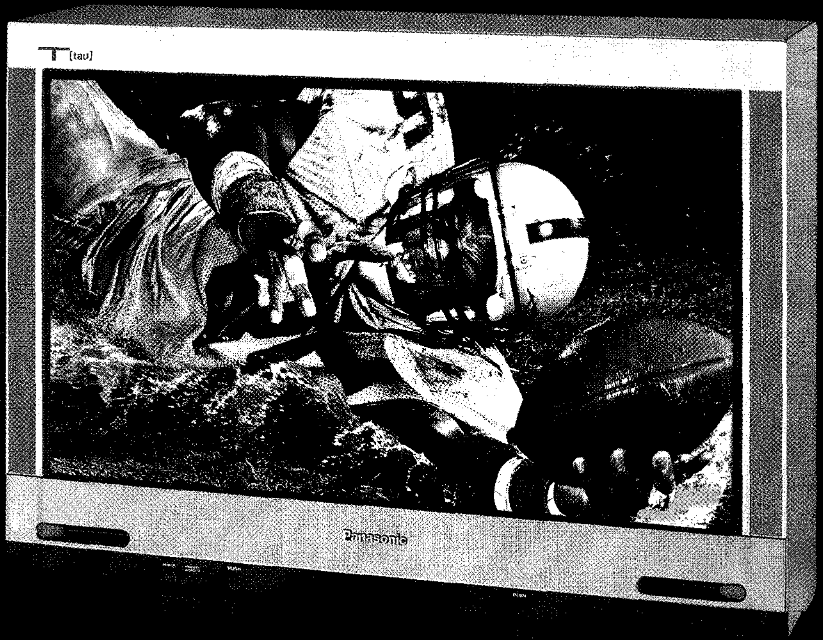

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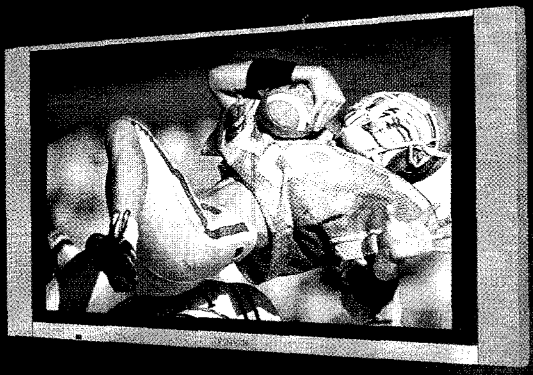

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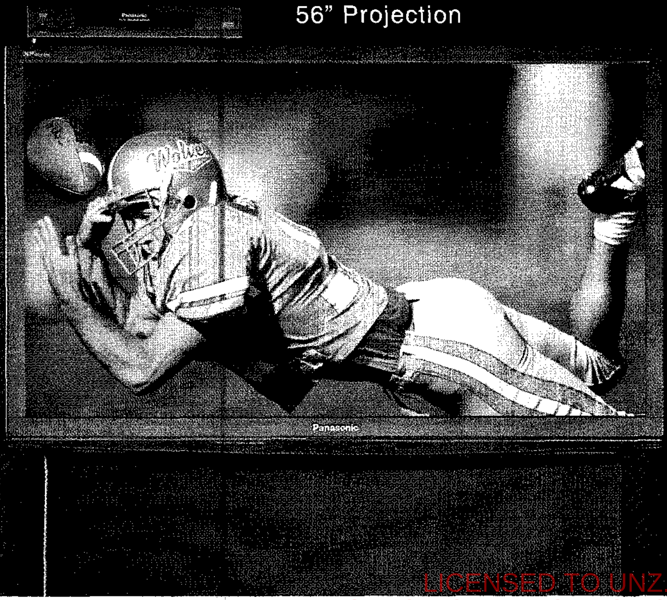

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cooked. We could do pneumatic, if the person didn't mind a little air blowing. We could make something out of piezo plastic, but if you want to be cheap Saran wrap does the same thing, once you silver it on both sides."

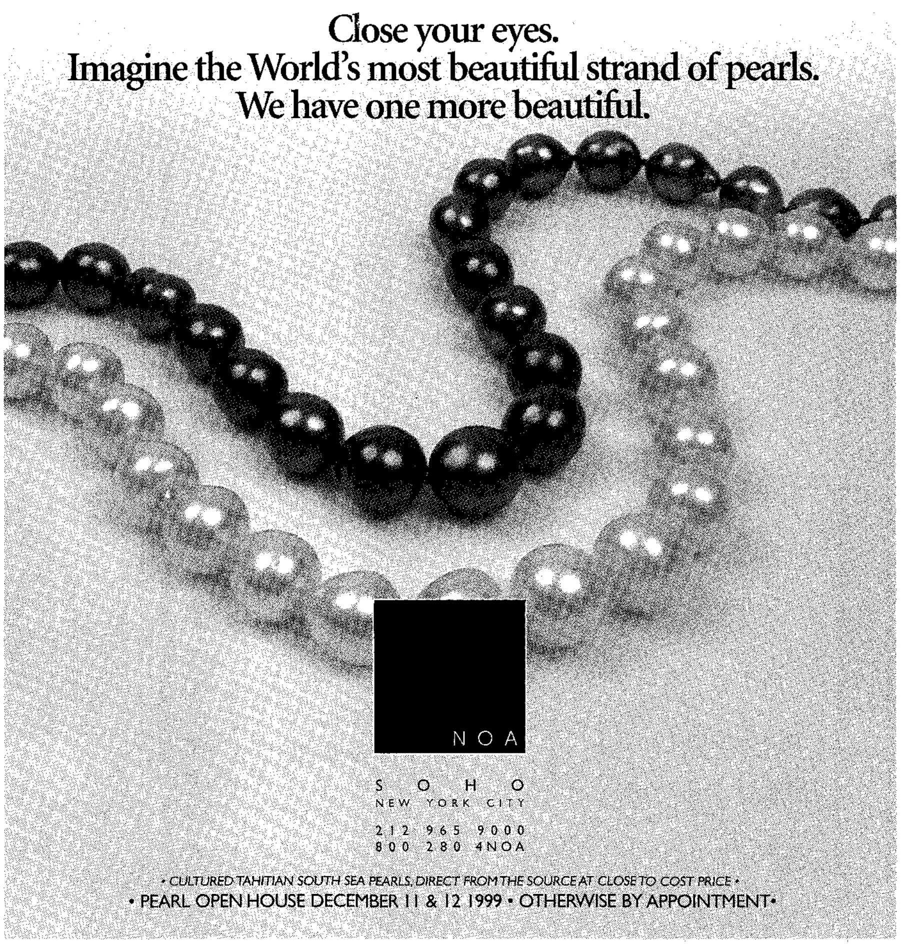
Levy laughed despairingly.

"Don't laugh!" Howatt cried, throwing up his arms. "It would work!"

The posture device may work or it may not. It's too early to tell. But it's a project for the future: right at the moment, Levy has too much else going on. For instance, he just heard from the people for whom he was making the tent that they love the design, and are planning to put it on the market by the end of 2000.This is very good financial news. As its inventor, he will likely receive something like ten per cent of wholesale revenues, so if his product manages to siphon off, say, fifty per cent of his competitor's market he stands to earn around three-quarters of a million dollars a year.

Levy finished the tent quite recently, late one night in his basement. He was working under the gun: the company representative who had presented him with the problem was returning to China the following morning, and he wanted to take Levy's prototype with him. The tent was almost finished, but it wasn't behaving as Levy thought it should. "There are eight points that connect to the frame, and I had connected seven of them," he remembers. "The structure was still very flimsy, though. It was shaking all over the place. Then I attached the eighth point, and all of a sudden I thought that something was wrong. It was completely irrational, but I actually thought for a moment I'd accidentally bolted the tent to the floor, because it was too strong—it was impossibly strong. And then I shouted. It was one of those eureka moments. It was amazing. That was the first time I thought, Wow, this is real. It's real!"

Working by himself, Levy is free to waste weeks on impractical ideas; to fantasize about the things he'll do if his keyboard makes him rich; to stop working altogether if he's distracted or annoyed. He is like a stand-up comedian writing out an act: sitting alone, trying to think of the sort of common but unnamed irritations calling attention to which will cause his audience to cry out in delighted and amazed recognition. ♦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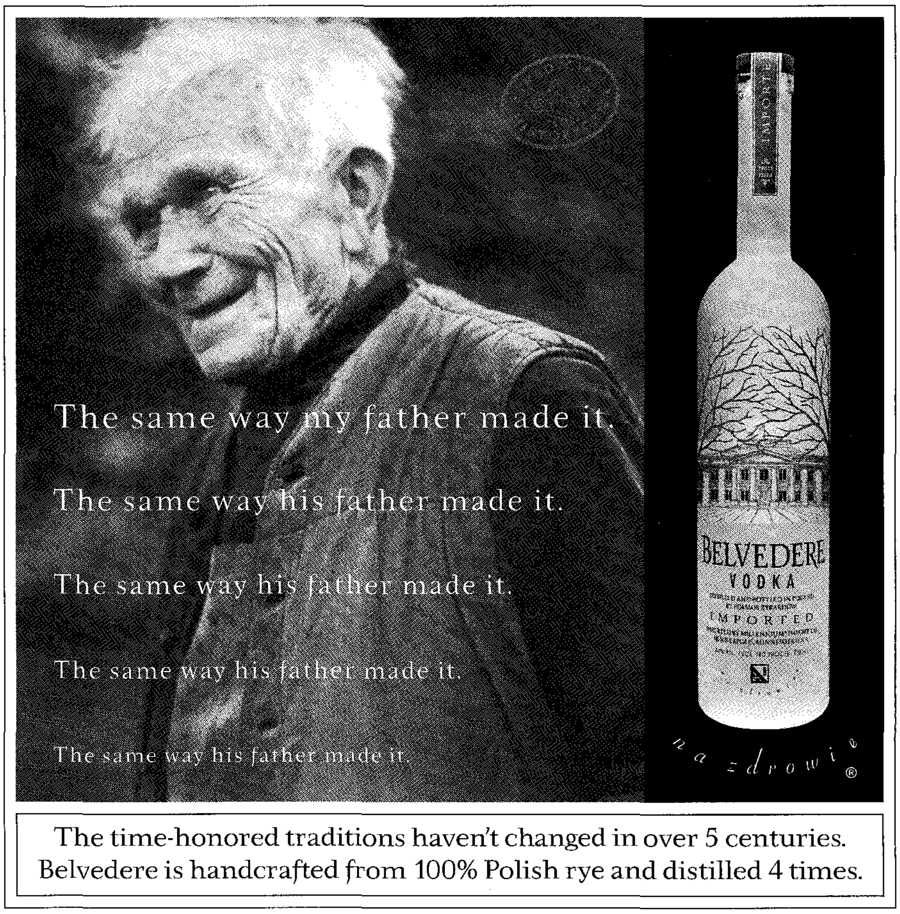
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BY JACK HANDEY

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If you found other things in my pockets, kindly do not read or keep them. They are none of your business and/or do not belong to you. And remember that, even though I am unconscious now, when I wake up I will remember the things I had.

If I am wearing a tie, please loosen it. But, again, do not take it off and keep it. It is not yours and is probably more expensive than you can afford. If I am not wearing a tie, look around at the other people who have gathered to look at me and see if any of them is wearing a tie that might belong to me. If so, please approach that individual and ask for my tie back. If he says it is his, say you do not think so. If he insists, give him one of the cards (in the same pocket where you found this note) of my attorney, and tell the person he will be hearing from him soon.

Keep me warm. Take off your coat and put it around me. Do not worry, you will get it back. If you do not, within thirty days contact the attorney on the card, and he will advise you.

If you must, build a fire to keep me warm. But—and this is very important—DO NOT ROAST ME OVER THE FIRE. I say this because many people who stop to help others are not that smart, and are capable of doing such a thing.

There are some pills in one of my pockets. Take them and hold on to them. If any authorities ask you about them, say they are yours.

If I am outdoors under a hot sun, do not allow children near me with a magnifying glass. Even if they are on leashes, do not allow monkeys near me. Do not allow others to make fun of me, poke me with sticks, or, if an anthill is nearby, pour honey on me. Do not allow onlookers to pose with me for "funny" photos. Failure to stop any of these things may be construed as participation in them, and may subject you to severe legal remedies.

Try to keep me calm. If you are not a physically attractive person, try not to let yourself be the first thing I see when I wake up.

Call an ambulance. I guess that would be obvious to most people, but you never know.

If I am on fire, put me out. If you put me out by rolling me on the ground, do not let me roll down a hill. If I do roll down a hill and get stuck under some bushes, just leave me there; you've given me enough "help" already.

If I suddenly begin to sweat profusely and my entire body begins to shimmy violently, do not worry; that is normal.

If I am bleeding, how'd that happen? What did you do now?

Even though I am unconscious, do not dangle things over me. I do not like that.

Answer my cell phone if it rings. If it is a woman named Peggy, pretend to be me and say you are breaking up with her.

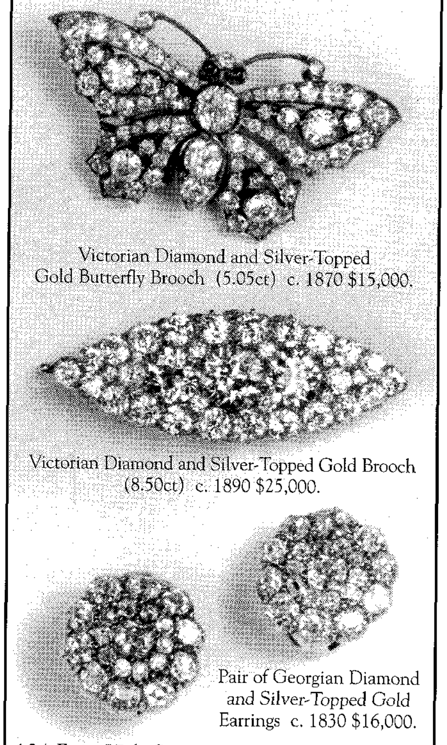
If I have wet my pants, get a glass of water and act like you tripped and spilled it on my pants.

If I appear near death, do not call a priest. And do not call a rabbi and a minister, and have them all go into a bar and do something funny, because I don't want my life to end up as one big joke.

Get a better job. If you have time to stop for unconscious people, you are obviously not working at full capacity.

Thank you again for stopping. Now, please, stand back and give me some air. ♦

ZOHAR LAZAR



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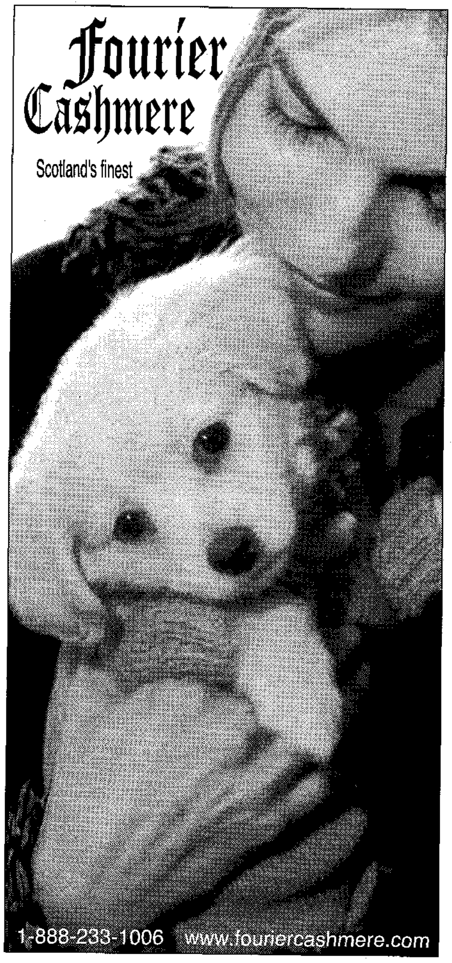

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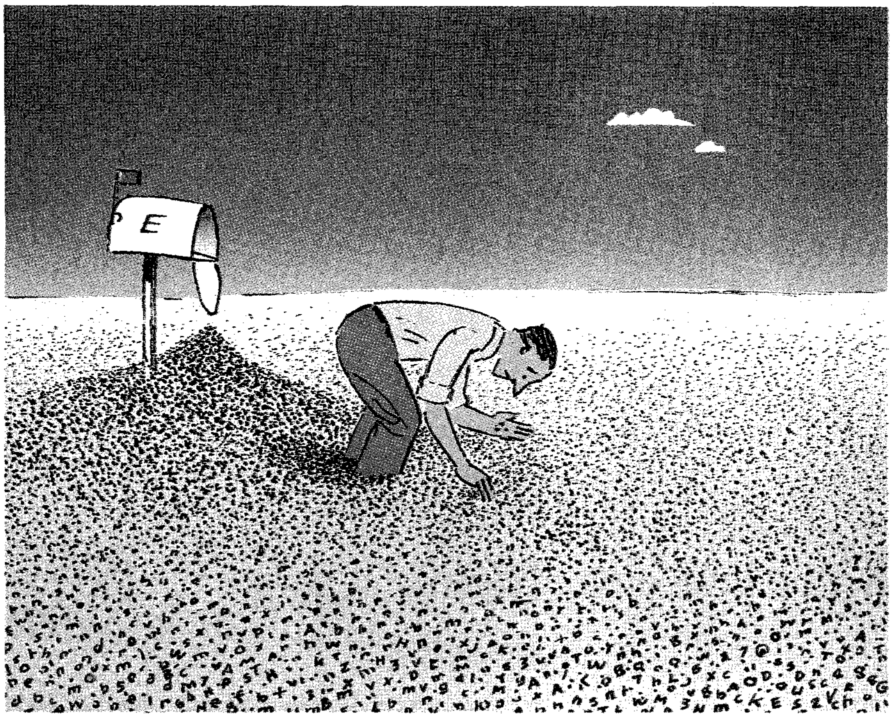


OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

YOUR MAIL HAS VANISHED

What happens to the messages you never got?

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

NOT long ago, I sent an E-mail to a friend of mine who works at *The New Yorker.* There was nothing unusual about that; I send a lot of E-mail. But this message never got to him. Somewhere between my desk, in Rome, and his, in Manhattan, the note disappeared—vanishing among the millions of similarly unimportant messages that must have crossed the Atlantic that day. Most people seem to accept those periodic losses as part of a cyberian life. I assumed that my friend had somehow overlooked my note, but he swore the message wasn't there. So I retrieved my copy from the "Sent Items" folder and sent it again. I also wrote to two other people with "newyorker.com" in their addresses. This time, everyone had received the mail when I called to check, less than five minutes later.

How could that be? How could some of my messages navigate through thousands of miles of cables—across a continent, beneath an ocean, around the East Coast of the United States (with, as it turned out, a regular detour to Illinois)—plow into the intense electronic maze of New York City, switch from my Internet service to their Internet service, and then pop up on several desktops simultaneously about fourteen seconds later? More important, how could that other message have failed to do the same thing? Was it out there coursing hopelessly through the ether, or had it broken apart into thousands of meaningless bytes—like one of those rockets that reënter the atmosphere at slightly the wrong trajectory?

I take E-mail very seriously, and, judging by just about any statistic you wish to consider, I am not alone. In the first quarter of this year—just three months—fifty-seven million new E-mail boxes appeared on the planet, bringing the total to nearly four hundred million. The United States accounts for about sixty per cent of them, but the figures everywhere are growing so fast that it's hard for anybody to keep track. Not every American has an E-mail address, of course. Some people have several, and many of the other addresses are corporate mailboxes. Still, every survey—and there have been dozens—shows that E-mail is by far the most frequently used and highly prized feature of the Internet. Not eBay, or MP3s, or the card catalogue at your local library. Not even pornography. Just mail.

No technology has ever become so ubiquitous so fast. It took the telephone forty years to reach its first ten million customers; fax machines were adopted that widely in less than half the time. Personal computers made it to ten million American homes within five years after they were introduced, in 1981, but E-mail reached that many users in little more than a year. In fact, in 1995, the amount of electronic mail delivered in the United States surpassed the amount of "snail" mail printed on paper and handled by the United States Postal Service. Among those few people who noticed were worried postal officials; recent predictions suggest that the volume of first-class mail delivered in the United States will peak in 2002. After that, the trend lines all point seriously in the wrong direction. It is impossible to predict how many of America's 38,019 post offices will be around in a decade, but, unless the Postal Service manages to ship a large percentage of all future purchases made on the Internet, the number certainly isn't going to be anywhere near thirty-eight thousand. So E-mail matters.

But when something matters, it has to be reliable—like the telephone. That's one reason that the lost message bothered me so much. I decided to call the people who maintain the computer networks at *The New Yorker* and try to find out what happened. They told me that the servers in the building—the central computers that hold the mail when it comes in and act essentially as local electronic post offices—had been working without any problem that day. Then I called their counterparts at Condé Nast, whose servers control *The New Yorker's* servers. Nothing was wrong there, either.

That suggested the trouble had to lie in the only other link in the electronic chain—my Internet service provider, the I.B.M. Global Network. I called the local support number in Rome, pushed a button that meant I would prefer to

GUY BILLOUT

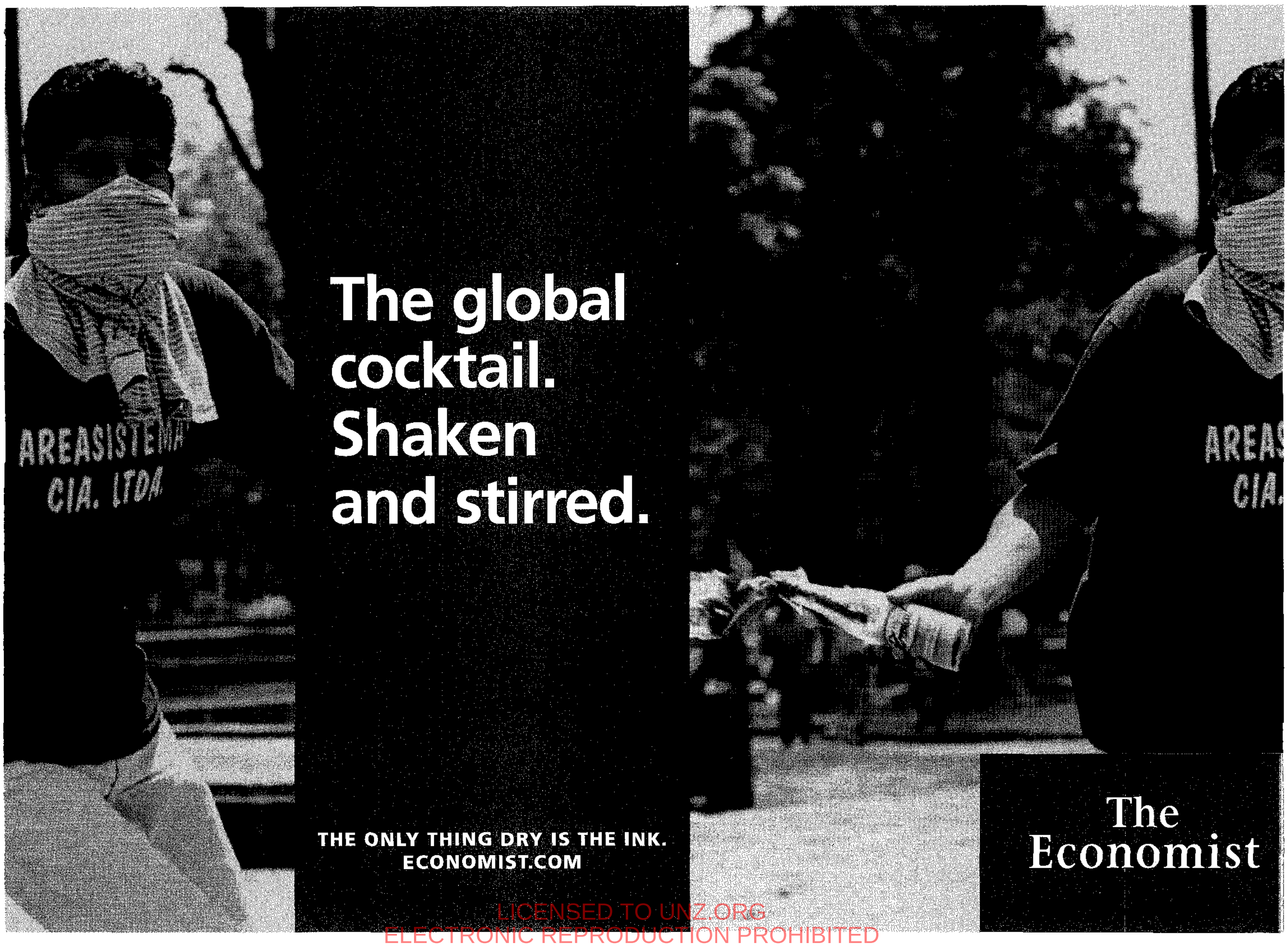
get my help in English, and was immediately connected to a woman in Dublin who told me very gently that my message was gone for good. She was polite, but she clearly thought I was worth about thirty seconds of her time, especially after I admitted that I had kept a copy of the original message, that it wasn't important in the first place, and that the second time I sent it the message got where it was going without delay. She laughed, obviously having encountered people like me before. "I can't imagine what your problem is then, sir," she said in a rich, untroubled brogue. "There is nothing wrong with our system today. Nothing wrong anywhere in the world. Sometimes these things just happen and they can't be explained. I suggest you chalk it up to fate."

I DON'T believe in fate; I believe in technology. So I decided to continue the search. I wasn't optimistic about the prospects of finding my message, but I wanted to know how something can simply disappear into a telephone wire and never come out again. It soon became clear that the next place I would have to look was Schaumburg, Illinois. Schaumburg, about fifteen miles from Chicago, is the home of A.T. & T. Global Network Services. I.B.M. sold Global Network Services to A.T. & T. last year, because A.T. & T. is in the bandwidth business—the pipelines that connect the dot-coms on the Internet—and I.B.M. is not. A.T. & T. is now doubling its bandwidth capacity every six months, as are most of its biggest competitors. All over America, scientists are scrambling to find ways to cram ever more light—and therefore more data—into the roughly ten million miles of fibre-optic cable tunnelling through the nation.

It took me a few days to find anybody willing to discuss my problem. (A.T. & T. was skittish, no doubt, because pointless allegorical quests don't interest the company much.) Still, the people there said they were willing to show me how the system works. So, before long, I found myself in suburban Illinois, standing in a giant parking lot and staring at a thoroughly unremarkable eleven-story office building. All around me, hundreds of tons of late-model S.U.V.s were whizzing along I-90, toward O'Hare International Airport.

I told Nancy Smith, who handles public relations for A.T. & T., that I wanted to see where my mail was stored and how it got there. She was incredibly helpful, but, before she said a word, I think I heard her sigh. She told me straight off that you can never fully trace a lost E-mail; it's hard enough to trace mail that gets where it's supposed to go. She also said that people often imagine giant E-mail depots to be the modern equivalent of the great public-works projects of earlier eras—like the Grand Coulee Dam, for example. "I know what you are expecting to see," Smith had told me before I set off. "You won't find it. It sounds very dramatic, but it's not. There is actually very little there. Some boxes and wires really. You could be disappointed."

I didn't think so. My visions ran more toward the control room at Cape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Canaveral. I imagined a place full of technicians determined to orchestrate the flow of the world's E-mail as it pulsed through enough fibre-optic cable to strangle the earth. It wasn't such an irrational thought. The economic and technical realities of this virtual world are like those of no place that has ever existed: they really do seem to be greater than the sum of their parts (as anyone who has invested in the E-stock market may have noticed). Now that A.T. & T. owns the I.B.M. Internet service, it has two and a half million customers in fifty-two countries. There are about six thousand five hundred such Internet service providers in the United States. Many of them are little local services, and others, like EarthLink, which recently merged with MindSpring, are growing rapidly. Even the surprisingly insignificant Microsoft network has been on a roll in the past six months. But only America Online, which dwarfs all its competitors, with more than twenty million members, is bigger than A.T. & T.

EVERY piece of mail sent to an attglobal.net address—whether the owner of the mailbox lives in Vladivostok or Paris or Shaker Heights—makes at least a quick stop at a postbox in Schaumburg, and it sits there until it's collected through one of about thirteen hundred and fifty local phone numbers that A.T. & T. maintains for that purpose. I have moved around often in the five years since first signing on with I.B.M., and I was curious to see my server. I knew, of course, that it's just a hard drive, a small chunk of magnetized metal that I share with about a quarter of a million people, none of whom I will ever meet. But that's a little like saying that my American Express card is just a little piece of plastic. That server is a pulpit, a launchpad, and the communal hub of my life. Whether I'm in Moscow or Miami, or anyplace between, my principal connection to the rest of the world sits on a metal rack in Schaumburg. The thought that every piece of E-mail I have received since 1995 had to pass through this one building left me feeling a little woozy.

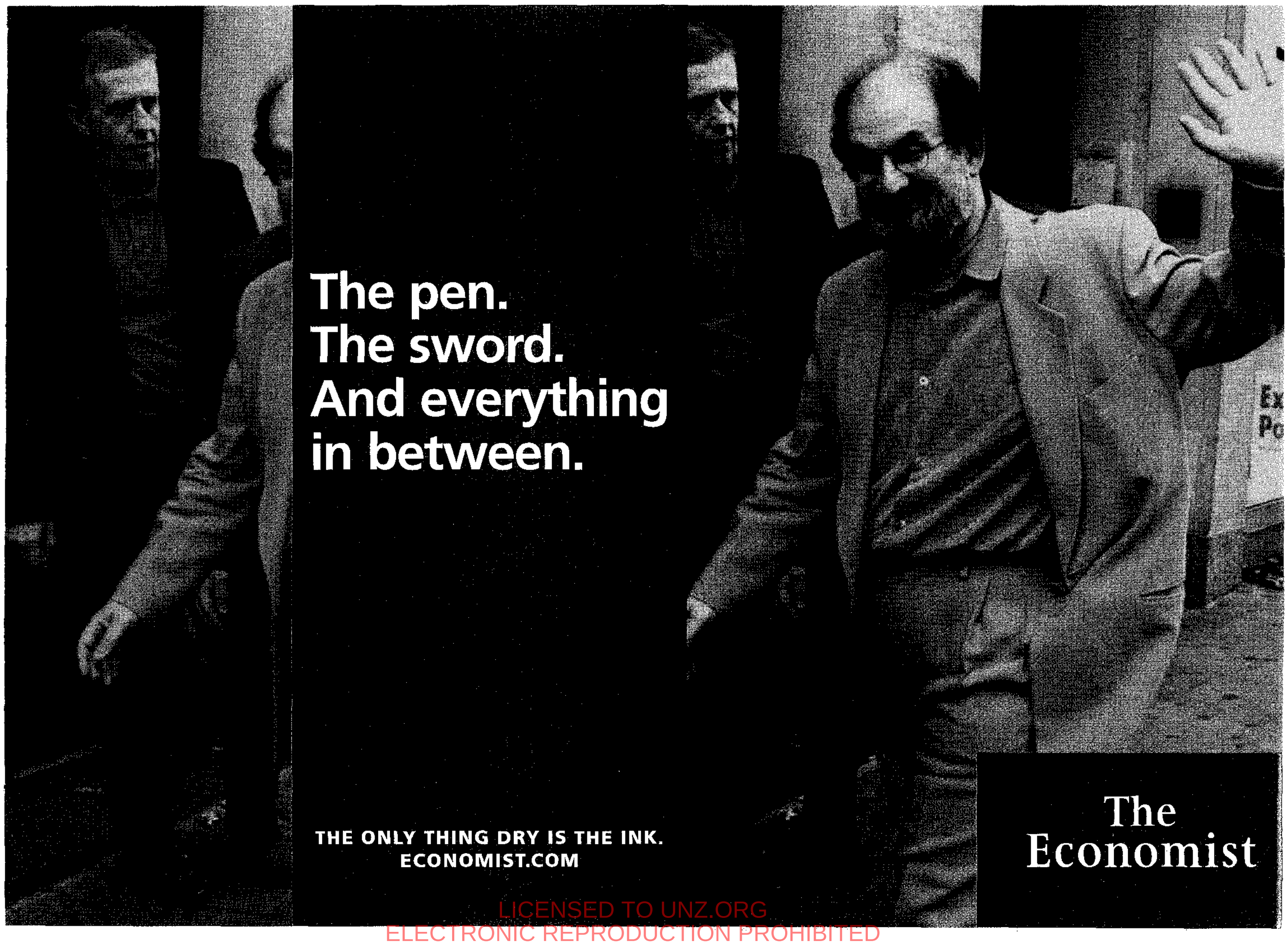
When I got there, I was going to have the opportunity to become one of the few Americans ever to visit their POP server—the computer that stores your mail when you are not connected to the Internet. POP stands for "post office protocol," and the server, in this case, runs a software package designed to handle E-mail. Once you sign on, your E-mail program asks the server to deliver your mail, and under normal circumstances the mail is then taken from the server's hard drive and forwarded directly to wherever you happen to be.

Nancy Smith had also promised to gather some specialists for my benefit. One of them was Rick Gretsch, an affable man who helped launch the I.B.M. Internet Connection Service, and is still in charge of the team, although he was traded—along with the wires, the cables, the servers, and several thousand of his colleagues—to A.T. & T. in the sale, last April. When I arrived at his office, Gretsch told me, "E-mail isn't as different from regular mail as people think. You have a message you want to send, it has an address, and we are carriers whose job it is to figure out how to get it from one place to the next."

Sounds simple enough. But in fact the complexities of E-mail are vast, and, other than being undeterred by rain, sleet, or dark of night, it has little in common with traditional correspondence. First, when you send a message by E-mail—whether it's headed toward a computer a mile away or one on the other side of the world—the mail gets chopped into digestible pieces of data, called packets, which are easier to push through crowded phone lines and easier to recover. During times of real congestion, each packet can take a different route to the same place—it's as if every page in a letter were delivered by a separate mailman. But each packet is assigned a unique identification number by standard Internet software, and when the packets arrive at their destination they are stitched back together and delivered in their original form. If they don't get back together, they don't get delivered. That's one reason some messages arrive so quickly, others take a while, and a few never make it at all.

Obviously, nobody can sit around and "figure out" electronic mail routes when a message sent from Rome usually takes less than a minute to get to New York. In that time, if you use A.T. & T., the message will typically pass through the company's network hubs in Milan, Berlin, Southern England, suburban Maryland, and two or three places in New York. The decisions have all been programmed into computer software that can send a piece of mail by the quickest, or cheapest, or most efficient, route. (And no, the quickest or cheapest way is not always the most efficient.) The route can be quite simple or astonishingly indirect.

Essentially, all Internet E-mail today follows a protocol—a kind of electronic recipe—called S.M.T.P., which stands for "simple mail transfer protocol." S.M.T.P. has become standard in just the way the basic engineering for a microwave oven or a VCR is now universal. Whether you are using Eudora or Netscape Mail or Microsoft Outlook, it's really just all S.M.T.P. under the covers, governing how the mail gets routed from place to place. And, as the E-mail travels from source to destination, it leaves a little trace of itself—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like a few electronic bread crumbs—everywhere it goes. That puts a record at each stop along the way, a detail that is stored in a "header" at the front of the E-mail. Those headers often get long and technical, so most E-mail programs or Internet service providers strip them off or hide them from the recipient. They are not often missed; after all, does anybody send a package of cookies to a child at camp and then wonder which roads it travelled to get there?

For the adventurous, there is a program called traceroute, which can be run in a DOS window. If I run a trace on the route of an E-mail I sent to a friend in the Hamptons, I can watch it bounce along from city to city until it switches to what seems to be a local A.O.L. server in New York. This particular trip took about seven seconds. Most are shorter. Here is an E-mail I received from Brian E. Carpenter, who is the chairman of the Internet Architecture Board and the program director for I.B.M.'s Internet Standards & Technology. He was trying to explain how a message he sent found its way to my computer:

> Michael,
> If I look up "newyorker.com" in the Domain Name System, I find that SMTP mail for newyorker.com is to be sent to a machine called cnpsm.condenast.com. So then I logged into a Unix machine at the I.B.M. Hursley lab in England and typed

```
traceroute cnpsm.condenast.com
```

> and Unix replies thus:

```
traceroute to cnpsm.condenast.com (204.252.201.4), 30 hops max, 40 byte packets

1 hurroute (9.20.4.7) 2 ms * *

2 mersey (9.20.62.10) 3 ms 3 ms 2 ms

3 efw (194.196.110.1) 11 ms 4 ms 4 ms

4 ign-gw (195.212.14.225) 6 ms 5 ms 6 ms

5 port1br1-1-5-1.pt.uk.ibm.net (152.158.23.250) 34 ms 62 ms 47 ms

6 port1br3-10-1-0.pt.uk.ibm.net (152.158.23.27) 267 ms 171 ms 133 ms

7 nyor1ar1-0-7.ny.us.ibm.net (165.87.140.6) 146 ms 124 ms 136 ms

8 nyor1sr2-10-0-0.ny.us.ibm.net (165.87.28.117) 144 ms 117 ms 149 ms

9 nyc-uunet.ny.us.ibm.net (165.87.220.13) 161 ms 134 ms 143 ms

10 105.ATM2-0.XR2.NYC1.ALTER.NET (146.188.177.158) 164 ms 123 ms 142 ms
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11 294.ATM6-0.XR2.NYC4.ALTER.NET (146.188.178.106) 142 ms 145 ms 162 ms

12 188.ATM9-0-0.GW2.NYC4.ALTER.NET (146.188.178.141) 134 ms 147 ms 150 ms

13 cnprouter.condenast.com (204.252.200.33) 152 ms 165 ms 165 ms

14 * * *

15 * * *

16 * * *
```
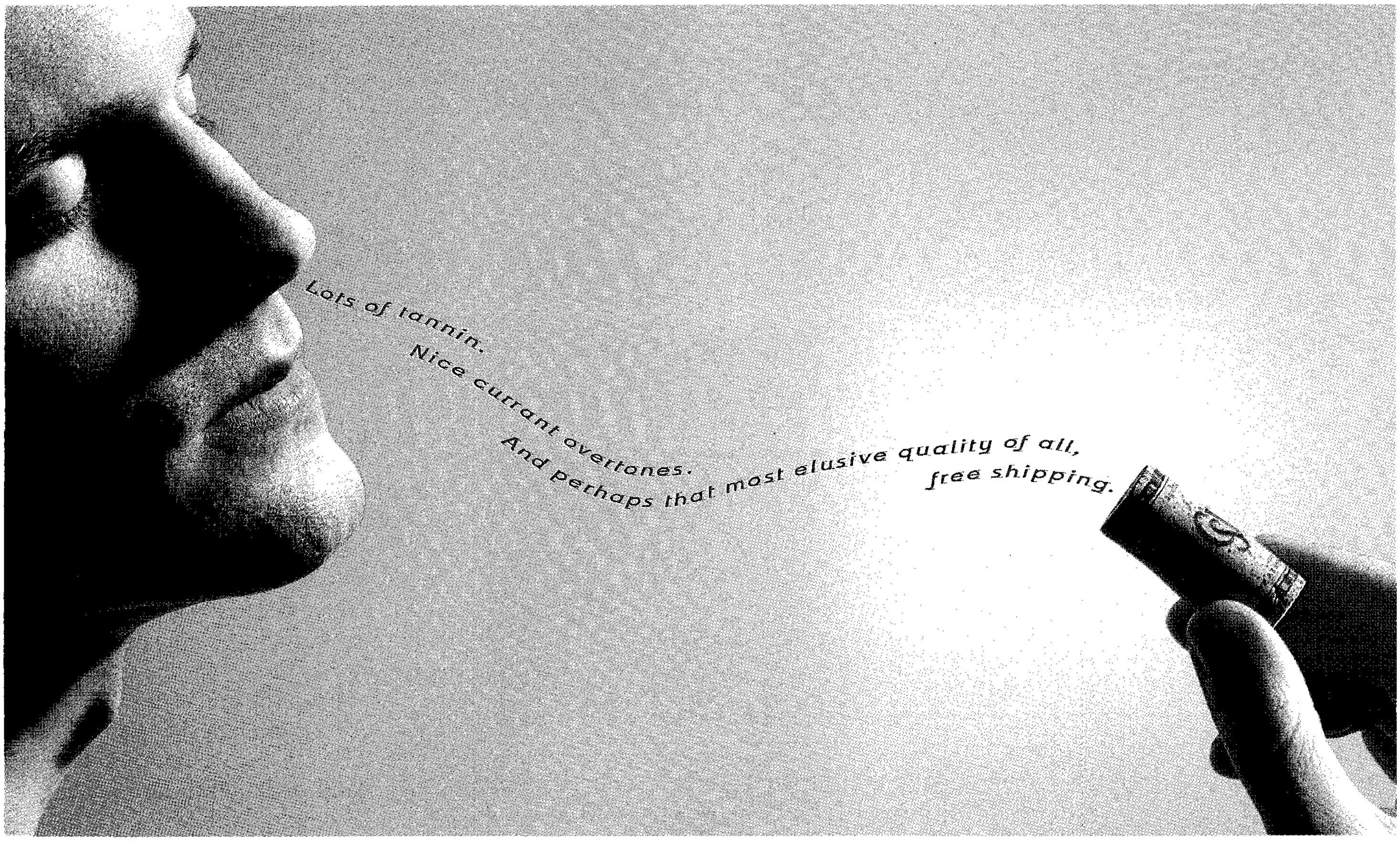

What this tells me is that the routing is through three routers at IBM Hursley, then #4 is a quick hop across the IBM Global Network (which IBM recently sold to ATT), then there are five hops across IBM.NET and three hops across Alternet, which must be the Internet service provider used by Condé Nast. After that, we get a bunch of asterisks, which tells me that Condé Nast is hiding its internal network layout from my prying eyes. That's a common security precaution. The figures such as "152 ms" are round-trip times in milliseconds (measured three times).

In Schaumburg, Gretsch and several of his colleagues explained things while we sat in a conference room, eating a techno lunch: bananas, double-chocolate-chip cookies, and Diet Cokes. They told me that every router on the Internet constantly sends out messages that measure which paths are open and which are backed up, so that it can move traffic efficiently. (A router is a special device that determines the next place on the Internet to send a packet of data.) It's like the Rapid Transit Operations Command Center of the New York subway system. Traffic can often be diverted, held up, or rerouted to avoid delays on a busy trunk route. (In fact, when the World Trade Center was bombed, in 1993, the folks at Schaumburg—who were routinely monitoring the activity of several major customers in Manhattan at the time—noticed that something was amiss in the building even before one of their most important World Trade Center clients did.) After we talked for a while, Gretsch took me to see where my mail was kept.

THE United States government won't describe in detail how it protects NORAD missile silos. It's difficult to believe, though, that they are defended more vigorously than the five A.T. & T. servers in Schaumburg. "We run an entirely secure worldwide business out of this one building," Gretsch told me as we started our tour. There was some discussion about whether I could identify the building that houses the servers. The A.T. & T. people were nervous, but, recognizing that the information is already publicly available, they decided that I could at least mention the town. "People need to know that their E-mail will be there tomorrow," Sid Overbey, a vice-president in charge of Internet-access services, told me. "We have done everything possible to make certain it will be, no matter what tomorrow brings. A nuclear blast would take us out, of course. But we are as close to a hardened missile site as you can get without being built into the side of a mountain."

Sound like an exaggeration? I certainly thought so. But the five A.T. & T. servers, which together cost about a million dollars and carry between seven and ten million of the Internet's estimated three billion pieces of mail each day, are accessible to fewer than a dozen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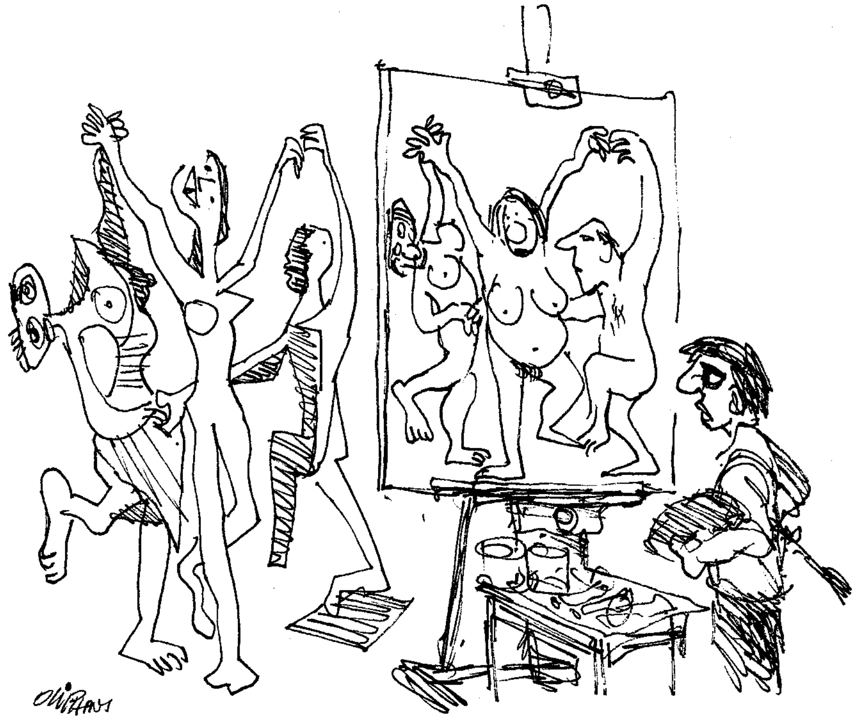

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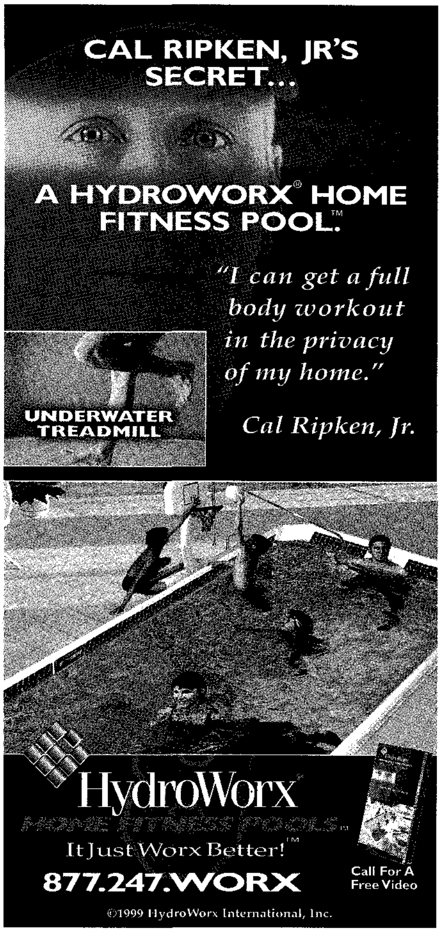

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people, each of whom has the coded ID needed to gain entry to the server room. (By contrast, the United States Postal Service would require thousands of employees to carry, sort, store, direct, and deliver those ten million pieces of mail each day.) The walls of the server room are made of the latest fireproof resins, and beneath the floor is a reservoir of halon, the best fire-suppression system commercially available. All this for five POP servers. (Mine is POP 6, but No. 2 was taken out of service a couple of years ago.)

The company has arranged to receive half its electricity from the city of Schaumburg and half from a neighboring town; that way, if one loses power, the building should be able to rely on the other. Besides the fire-detection systems, and the fact that the servers are backed up every week, A.T. & T. has fortified its Internet facility as well as any survivalist awaiting Armageddon. In the basement (the cleanest industrial space I have ever seen), scores of giant batteries fill a room the size of a cafeteria—to power the building in case of a blackout. Four times each month, the technical-support team cuts the building off from both utilities to make sure that the batteries can do their job. But, even if they should fail, not to worry: there are still four two-thousand-kilowatt diesel engines in the basement. They are always fuelled up and ready to take over within forty-five seconds. And, should things get really rocky out there, the company has buried thirty thousand gallons of additional diesel fuel in a secret location within easy reach of the turbines. It's a fair guess that, no matter what happens at the millennium, if there is a world on January 1st, then A.T. & T. customers will get their mail. The people at Schaumburg have decided that on December 31st they will switch to diesel power for at least a day or two, just to be on the safe side.

The servers are kept in a clean white room full of hard drives sitting in metal racks. The only colors one sees are from the red, blue, and green fibre-optic cords snaking around the floor. Nothing moves. There is no clock. In a way, Nancy Smith was right: the room is small, and is filled with wires, cables, and computers. It's a boring little room, but one of those metal boxes was labelled "POP. 6." It took me a few seconds to realize that I was staring at my server. "There's your mail," Mike Cassidy, an official who was on the tour with us, said slyly, eager to see how I would react. "Isn't it thrilling?"

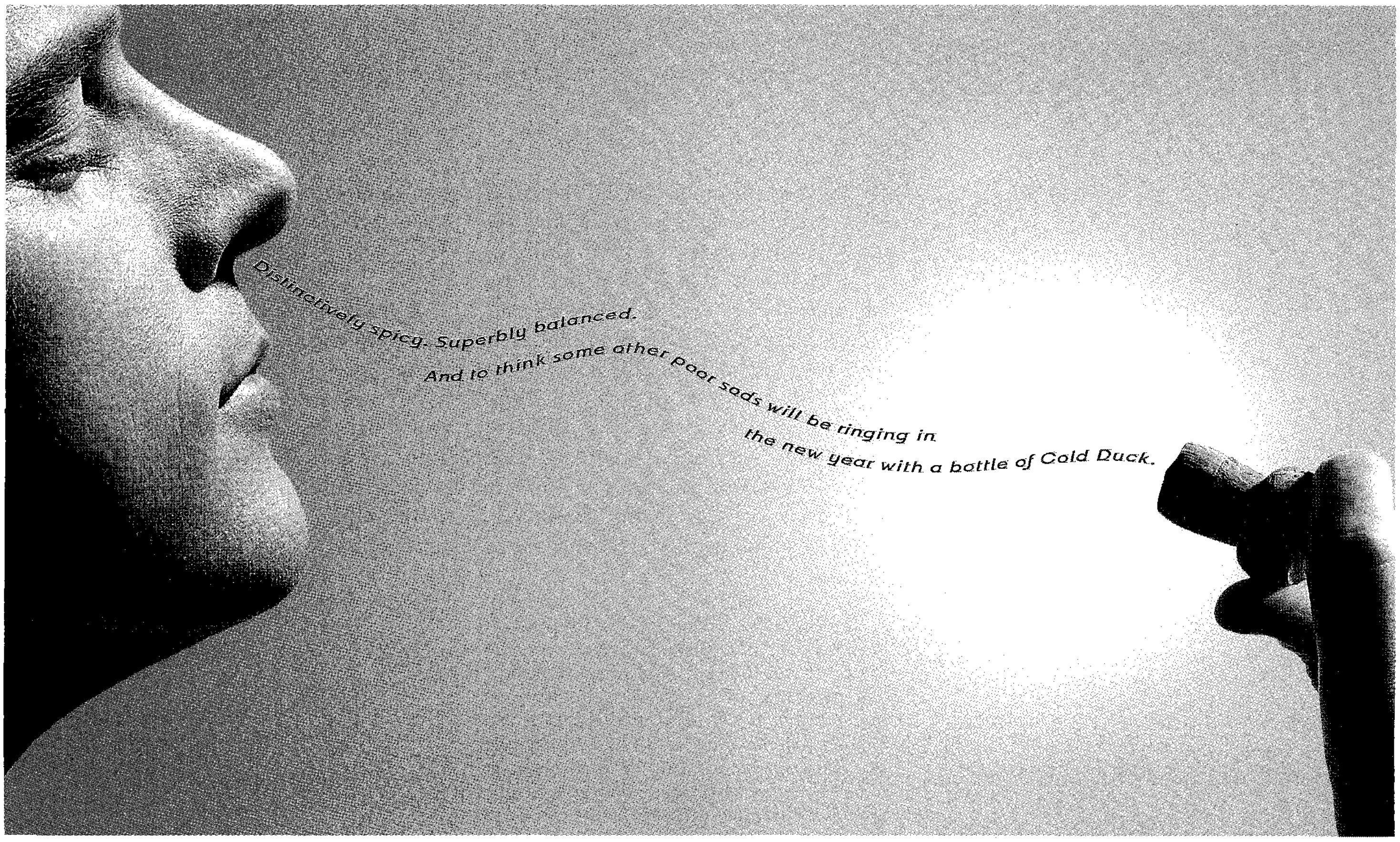
It was, actually, but I can't say why. By this time, I had abandoned my quest for the vanished E-mail I sent a month earlier. As Gretsch explained it, one of my packets might have been corrupted, or a telephone switch might have failed, and that would have shattered the whole piece of mail. Or it could have been destroyed at any one of the intermediate stops it had to make on its journey to New York. And that was clearly as close to an inquest or a corpse as I was going to get.

ONE day this fall, I was having lunch with David Singer, who has worked on the central structure of the Internet and has thought about the basic uses of E-mail since long before either existed in the public mind. Singer is a senior software engineer with the Internet Technology group, at I.B.M.; we were in the cafeteria at I.B.M.'s Almaden Research Center, gazing out at the rich brown scrublands above Silicon Valley.

"You know, this whole revolution was a bit of a fluke, really," Singer said. "We built a network at I.B.M. for file delivery. That was our goal. We wanted to make virtual files out of these giant bundles of punched cards we had. It was a way of moving the cards, and when we did that we realized we could also send messages to each other. Pretty soon it became the point. Then it became more than the point. But we aren't even halfway to where we are going. E-mail is impoverished. It has flaws; there is no tone of voice with E-mail. No subtlety and certainly no privacy. E-mail is postcards, not letters. It's a CB radio. It's primitive and raw, and if somebody wants to listen in he will. Yet the energy it has unleashed is hard to describe. It has already changed everything we do and changed it for good."

Singer believes in the Web completely, but, unlike some of his contemporaries, he is also willing to express ambivalence about the world he is helping to create. "The 24/7 society is wonderful as long as you are not required to be there all 24/7," he told me. "That is one of the things E-mail does for you. It lets you choose terms for communicating. I love the idea that I can get a prescription filled or buy a book at three in the morning. But I am very annoyed at the sense that I could be on call at those hours. I want my privacy, but at the same time I want total access. That is what E-mail gives you. That's where the revolution is."

It is sometimes hard to assess all the claims made for E-mail: that it has contributed to a renaissance in written communication, that it changes the way people relate to one another or think about time, that it eliminates hierarchies that have existed, literally, for centuries. Too often, it seems caught in some middle space—not quite writing, yet more than typing. It is a medium where you are permitted to use words in a way you wouldn't anywhere else. It is easy to be snobby about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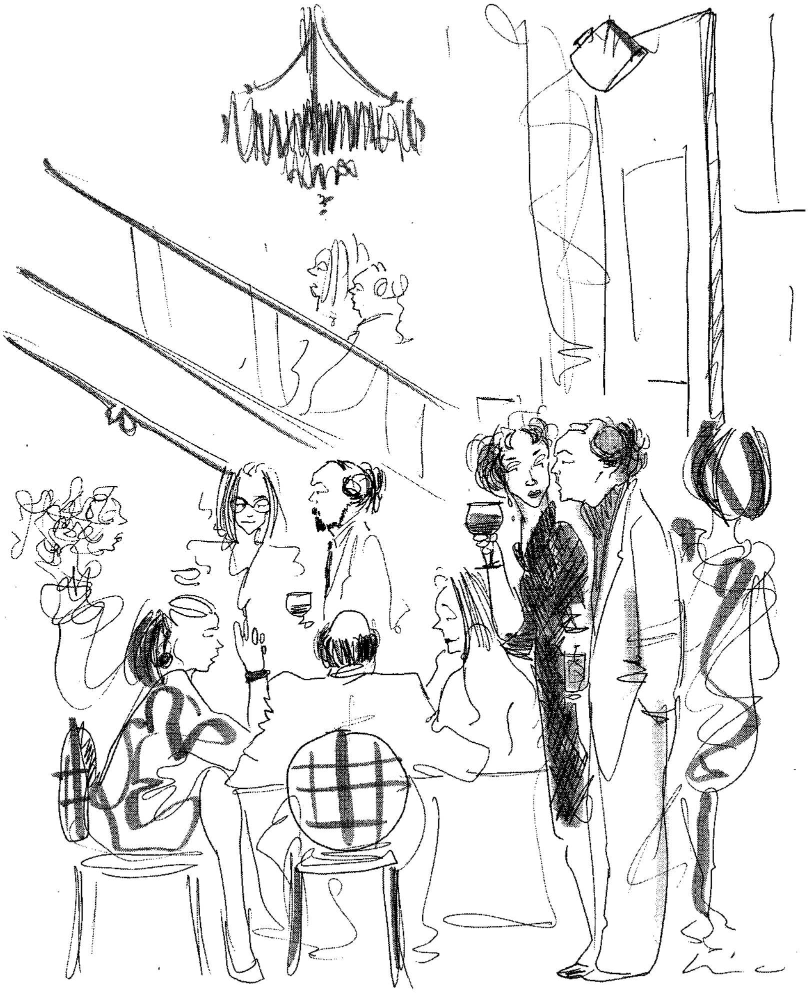


"All these people you invited—are they friends or just inventory?"

• •

E-mail; but for many people the words "You've got mail" have become among the most comforting they can hear all day.

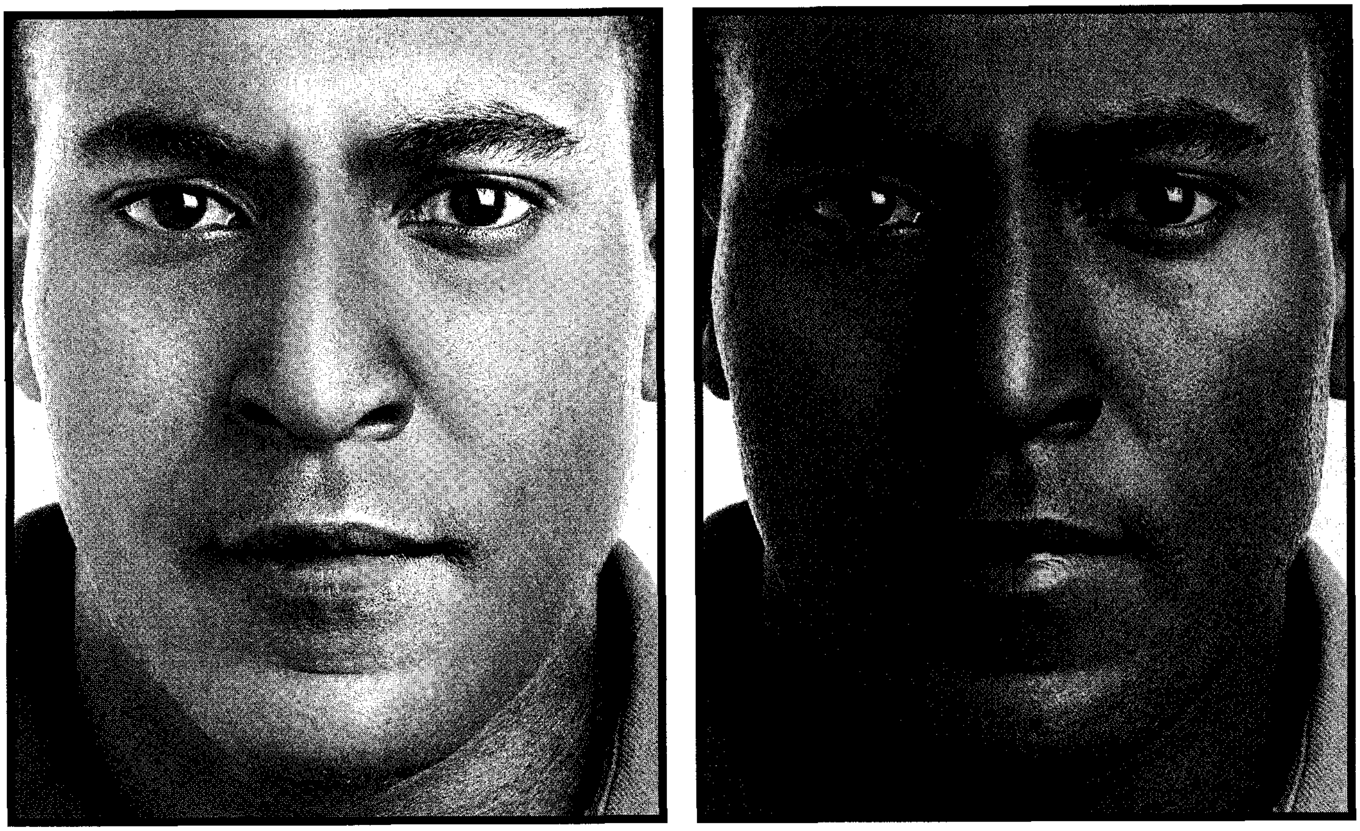
In Sylvia Brownrigg's novel "The Metaphysical Touch," the main character, Pi, is a deeply troubled philosopher who loses her books and all her work in the fire that ravaged Berkeley in 1991. Her mind, formed by words and contemplation, goes dark. She won't read or write or think about her past in any way. She is on the run from her intellect. Then, one day, a modem arrives in the mail:

> But Pi's asceticism didn't know what to make of e-mail. E-mail seemed permissible to her. It was quiet; it didn't require immediate response, as a voice on the telephone did; it was in her familiar medium, print, so it emerged though the loved language of her fingertips. But it didn't require a physical body of print on paper. Ontologically, e-mail was not in any recognizable category: neither voice nor paper, neither pure mind nor pure matter. And uncategorizable items often make it past regulations that don't know how to understand them. Pi's edict might have been to stay out of touch, but when she read her two pieces of e-mail she replied to them instantly.

It is, after all, almost impossible to turn away from E-mail—and that is not always a good thing. "All this technology is wonderful," David Singer said over lunch that day. "But only up to a point. It is not supposed to replace human relationships. It's just supposed to make them easier. People sometimes get confused about that, I'm afraid." ♦

> California Shakespeare Festival's "The Tempest" is onstage at 7 p.m. at the Bruns Memorial Amphitheatre in Orinda. The Duke of Milan has been ousted from his position of power by his brother and exiled, along with his daughter, to an island. Years later, he uses magic to shipwreck his brother on that same island. To get there, take the Gateway Boulevard exit off Highway 24.—*Oakland (Calif.) Tribune.*

But watch out for Caliban.



Which man looks guilty? If you picked the man on the right, you're wrong. Wrong for judging people based on the color of their skin. Because if you look closely, you'll see they're the same man. Unfortunately, racial stereotyping like this happens every day. On America's highways, police stop drivers based on their skin color rather than for the way they are driving. For example, in Florida 80% of those stopped and searched were black and Hispanic, while they constituted only 5% of all drivers. These humiliating and illegal searches are violations of the Constitution and must be fought. Help us defend your rights. Support the ACLU. www.aclu.org **american civil liberties union**

ANNALS OF RETAIL

CLICKS & MORTAR

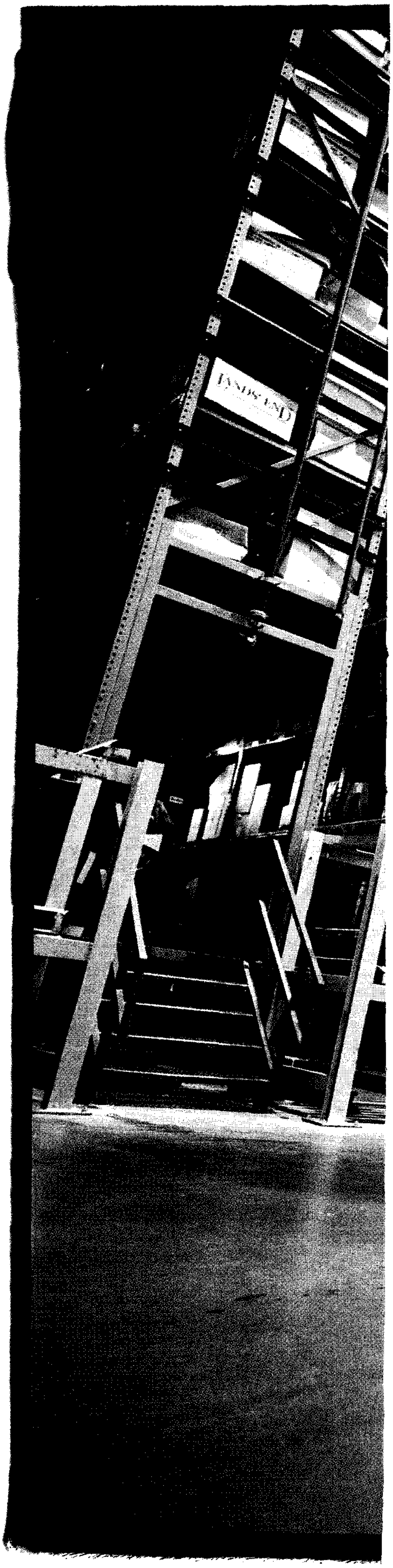
Don't believe the Internet hype: the real E-commerce revolution happened off line.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

AT the turn of this century, a Missouri farmer named D. Ward King invented a device that came to be known, in his honor, as the King Road Drag. It consisted of two wooden rails that lay side by side about three feet apart, attached by a series of wooden braces. If you pulled the King Drag along a muddy road, it had the almost magical effect of smoothing out the ruts and molding the dirt into a slight crown, so that the next time it rained the water would drain off to the sides. In 1906, when King demonstrated his device to a group of farmers in Wellsville, Kansas, the locals went out and built a hundred King Drags of their own within the week, which makes sense, because if you had asked a farmer at the turn of the century what single invention could make his life easier he would probably have wanted something that improved the roads. They were, in the late nineteenth century, a disaster: of the country's two million miles of roads, fewer than a hundred and fifty thousand had been upgraded with gravel or oil. The rest were dirt. They turned into rivers of mud when it was raining, and hardened into an impassable sea of ruts when it was not. A trip to church or to go shopping was an exhausting ordeal for many farmers. At one point in the early part of this century, economists estimated that it cost more to haul a bushel of wheat along ten miles of American dirt road than it did to ship it across the ocean from New York to Liverpool.

The King Road Drag was a simple invention that had the effect of reducing the isolation of the American farmer, and soon that simple invention led to all kinds of dramatic changes. Ever since the Post Office was established, for example, farmers had to make the difficult trek into town to pick up their mail. In the eighteen-nineties, Congress pledged that mail would be delivered free to every farmer's home, but only so long as rural communities could demonstrate that their roads were good enough for a mailman to pass by every day—which was a Catch-22 neatly resolved by the King Road Drag. And once you had rural free delivery and good roads, something like parcel post became inevitable. Through the beginning of the century, all packages that weighed more than four pounds were carried by private-express services, which were unreliable and expensive and would, outside big cities, deliver only to a set of depots. But if the mail was being delivered every day to rural dwellers, why not have the mailman deliver packages, too? In 1912, Congress agreed, and with that the age of the mail-order house began: now a farmer could look through a catalogue that contained many thousands of products and have them delivered right to his door. Smaller companies, with limited resources, had a way to bypass the middleman and reach customers all over the country. You no longer needed to sell to the consumer through actual stores made of bricks and mortar. You could build a virtual store!

In the first fifteen years of this century, in other words, America underwent something of a revolution. Before rural free delivery, if you didn't live in a town—and most Americans didn't—it wasn't really practical to get a daily newspaper. It was only after



The automated warehouse is as much a part of E-commerce as a Web site. Photograph by Chris Callis.

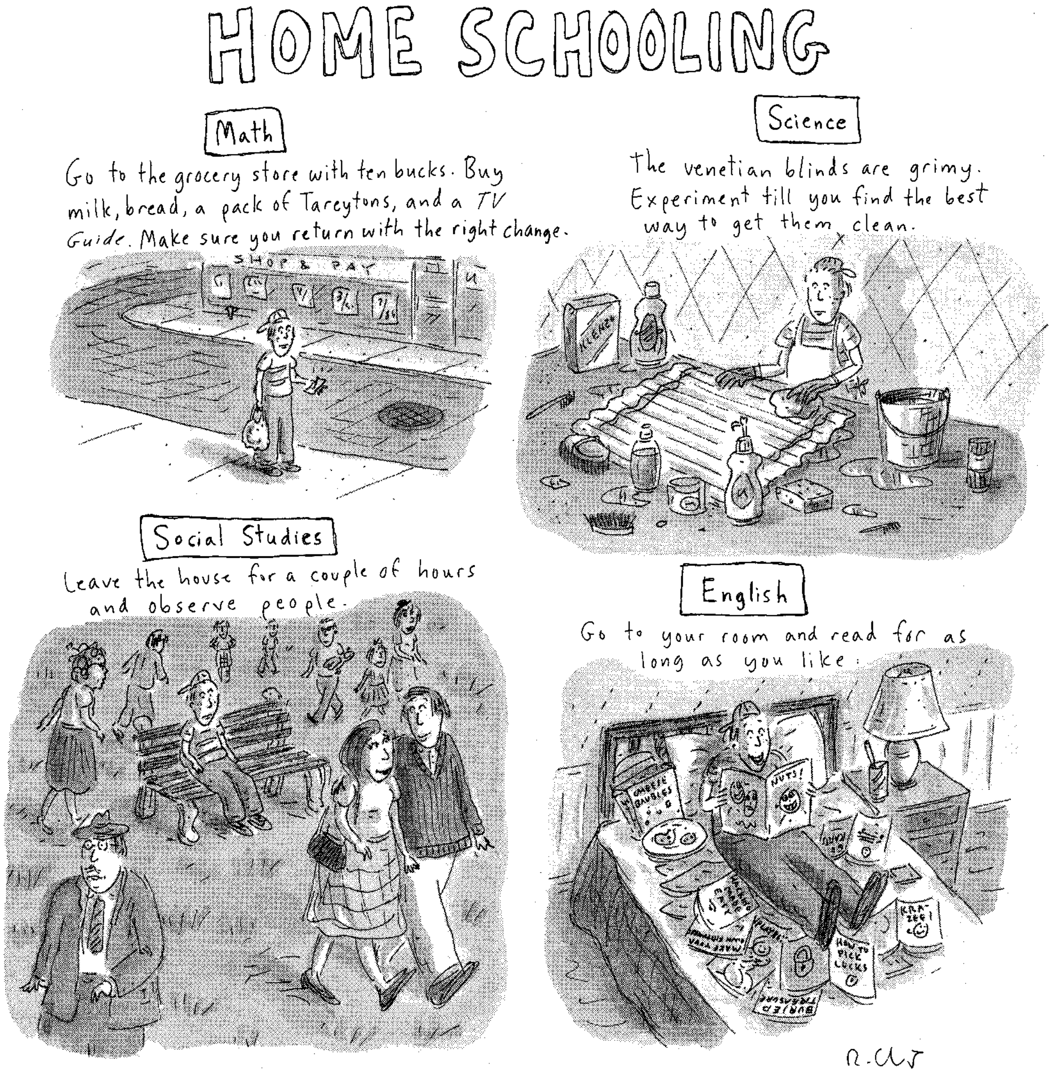
daily delivery that the country became "wired," in the sense that if something happened in Washington or France or the Congo one evening, everyone would know about it by the next morning. In 1898, mailmen were delivering about eighteen thousand pieces of mail per rural route. Within five years, that number had more than doubled, and by 1929 it had topped a hundred thousand.

Here was the dawn of the modern consumer economy—an economy in which information moved freely around the country, in which retailers and consumers, buyers and sellers became truly connected for the first time. "You may go to an average store, spend valuable time and select from a limited stock at retail prices," the fall 1915 Sears, Roebuck catalogue boasted, "or have our Big Store of World Wide Stocks at Economy Prices COME to you in this catalog—the Modern Way." By the turn of the century, the Sears catalogue had run to over a thousand pages, listing tens of thousands of items in twenty-four departments: music, buggies, stoves, carriage hardware, drugs, vehicles, shoes, notions, sewing machines, cloaks, sporting goods, dry goods, hardware, groceries, furniture and baby carriages, jewelry, optical goods, books, stereopticons, men's clothing, men's furnishings, bicycles, gramophones, and harnesses. Each page was a distinct site, offering a reader in-depth explanations and descriptions well beyond what he would expect if he went to a store, talked to a sales clerk, and personally examined a product. To find all those products, the company employed scores of human search engines—"missionaries" who, the historians Boris Emmet and John Jeuck write, were "said to travel constantly, inspecting the stocks of virtually all retail establishments in the country, conversing with the public at large to discover their needs and desires, and buying goods 'of all kinds and descriptions' " in order to post them on the World Wide Stock.

The catalogue, as economists have argued, represented a radical transformation in the marketing and distribution of consumer goods. But, of course, that transformation would not have been possible unless you had parcel post, and you couldn't have had parcel post unless you had rural free delivery, and you could not have had rural free delivery without good roads, and you would not have had good roads without D. Ward King. So what was the genuine revolution? Was it the World Wide Stock or was it the King Road Drag?

WE are now, it is said, in the midst of another business revolution. "This new economy represents a tectonic upheaval in our commonwealth, a far more turbulent reordering than mere digital hardware has produced," Kevin Kelly, a former executive editor of *Wired*, writes in his book "New Rules for the New Economy." In "Cyber Rules," the software entrepreneurs Thomas M. Siebel and Pat House compare the advent of the Internet to the invention of writing, the appearance of a metal currency in the eastern Mediterranean several thousand years ago, and the adoption of the Arabic zero. "Business," Bill Gates states flatly in the opening sentence of "Business @ the Speed of Thought," "is going to change more in the next ten years than it has in the last fifty."

The revolution of today, however, turns out to be as difficult to define as the revolution of a hundred years ago. Kelly, for example, writes that because of the Internet "the new economy is about *communication*, deep and wide." Communication, he maintains, "is not just a sec-


HOME SCHOOLING
Math
Go to the grocery store with ten bucks. Buy milk, bread, a pack of Tareytons, and a TV Guide. Make sure you return with the right change.
SHOP & PAY
Science
The venetian blinds are grimy. Experiment till you find the best way to get them clean.
BLEACH
Social Studies
Leave the house for a couple of hours and observe people.
English
Go to your room and read for as long as you like.
CHEESE DOUBLES
NUTS!
KRA-ZEE!
HOW TO PICK LOCKS
BURIED TREASURE

tor of the economy. Communication *is* the economy." But which is really key—how we communicate, or *what* we communicate? Gates, meanwhile, is preoccupied with the speed of interaction in the new economy. Going digital, he writes, will "shatter the old way of doing business" because it will permit almost instant communication. Yet why is the critical factor how quickly I communicate some decision or message to you—as opposed to how long it takes me to make that decision, or how long it takes you to act on it? Gates called his book "Business @ the Speed of Thought," but thought is a slow and messy thing. Computers do nothing to speed up our thought process; they only make it a lot faster to communicate our thoughts once we've had them. Gates should have called his book "Business @ the Speed of Typing." In "Growing Up Digital," Don Tapscott even goes so far as to claim that the rise of the Internet has created an entirely new personality among the young. N-Geners, as Tapscott dubs the generation,

> have a different set of assumptions about work than their parents have. They thrive on collaboration, and many find the notion of a boss somewhat bizarre. . . . They are driven to innovate and have a mindset of immediacy requiring fast results. They love hard work because working, learning, and playing are the same thing to them. They are creative in ways their parents could only imagine. . . . Corporations who hire them should be prepared to have their windows and walls shaken.

"Unfortunately, my crime spree occurred just before today's level of incompetence set in at the F.B.I."

Let's leave aside the fact that the qualities Tapscott ascribes to the Net Generation—energy, a "mindset of immediacy," creativity, a resistance to authority, and (of all things) sharp differences in outlook from their parents—could safely have been ascribed to every upcoming generation in history. What's interesting here is the blithe assumption, which runs through so much of the thinking and talking about the Internet, that this new way of exchanging information must be at the root of all changes now sweeping through our economy and culture. In these last few weeks before Christmas, as the country's magazines and airways become crowded with advertisements for the fledgling class of dot coms, we may be tempted to concur. But is it possible that, once again, we've been dazzled by the catalogues and forgotten the roads?

The world's largest on-line apparel retailer is Lands' End, in Wisconsin. Lands' End began in 1963 as a traditional mail-order company. It mailed you its catalogue, and you mailed back your order along with a check. Then, in the mid-nineteen-eighties, Lands' End, like the rest of the industry, reinvented itself. It mailed you its catalogue, and you telephoned an 800 number with your order and paid with a credit card. Now Lands' End has moved on line. In the first half of this year, E-commerce sales accounted for ten per cent of Lands' End's total business, up two hundred and fifty per cent from last year. What has this move to the Web meant?

Lands' End has its headquarters in the tiny farming town of Dodgeville, about an hour's drive west of Madison, through the rolling Midwestern countryside. The main Lands' End campus is composed of half a dozen modern, low-slung buildings, clustered around a giant parking lot. In one of those buildings, there is a huge open room filled with hundreds of people sitting in front of computer terminals and wearing headsets. These are the people who take your orders. Since the bulk of Lands' End's business is still driven by the catalogue and the 800 number, most of those people are simply talking on the phone to telephone customers. But a growing percentage of the reps are now part of the company's Internet team, serving people who use the Lands' End Live feature on the company's Web site. Lands' End Live allows customers, with the click of a mouse, to start a live chat with a Lands' End representative or get a rep to call them at home, immediately.

On a recent fall day, a Lands' End Live user—let's call her Betty—was talking to one of the company's customer-service reps, a tall, red-haired woman named Darcia. Betty was on the Lands' End Web site to buy a pair of sweatpants for her young daughter, and had phoned to ask a few questions.

"What size did I order last year?" Betty asked. "I think I need one size bigger." Darcia looked up the record of Betty's purchase. Last year, she told Betty, she bought the same pants in big-kid's small.

"I'm thinking medium or large," Betty said. She couldn't decide.

"The medium is a ten or a twelve, really closer to a twelve," Darcia told her. "I'm thinking if you go to a large, it will throw you up to a sixteen, which is really big."

Betty agreed. She wanted the medium. But now she had a question about delivery. It was Thursday morning, and she needed the pants by Tuesday. Darcia told her that the order would go out on Friday morning, and with U.P.S. second-day air she would almost certainly get it by Tuesday. They briefly discussed spending an extra six dollars for the premium, next-day service, but Darcia talked Betty out of it. It was only an eighteen-dollar order, after all.

Betty hung up, her decision made, and completed her order on the Internet. Darcia started an on-line chat with a woman from the East Coast. Let's call her Carol. Carol wanted to buy the forty-nine-dollar attaché case but couldn't decide on a color. Darcia was partial to the dark olive, which she said was "a professional alternative to black." Carol seemed convinced, but she wanted the case monogrammed and there were eleven monogramming styles on the Web-site page.

"Can I have a personal suggestion?" she wrote.

"Sure," Darcia typed back. "Who is the case for?"

"A conservative psychiatrist," Carol replied.

Darcia suggested block initials, in black. Carol agreed, and sent the order in herself on the Internet. "All right," Darcia said, as she ended the chat. "She feels better." The exchange had taken twenty-three minutes.

Notice that in each case the customer filled out the actual order herself and sent it in to the Lands' End computer electronically—which is, of course, the great promise of E-commerce. But that didn't make some human element irrelevant. The customers still needed Darcia for advice on colors, and styles, or for reassurance that their daughter was a medium and not a large. In each case, the sale was closed because that human interaction allayed the last-minute anxieties and doubts that so many of us have at the point of purchase. It's a mistake, in other words, to think that E-commerce will entirely automate the retail process. It just turns reps from order-takers into sales advisers.

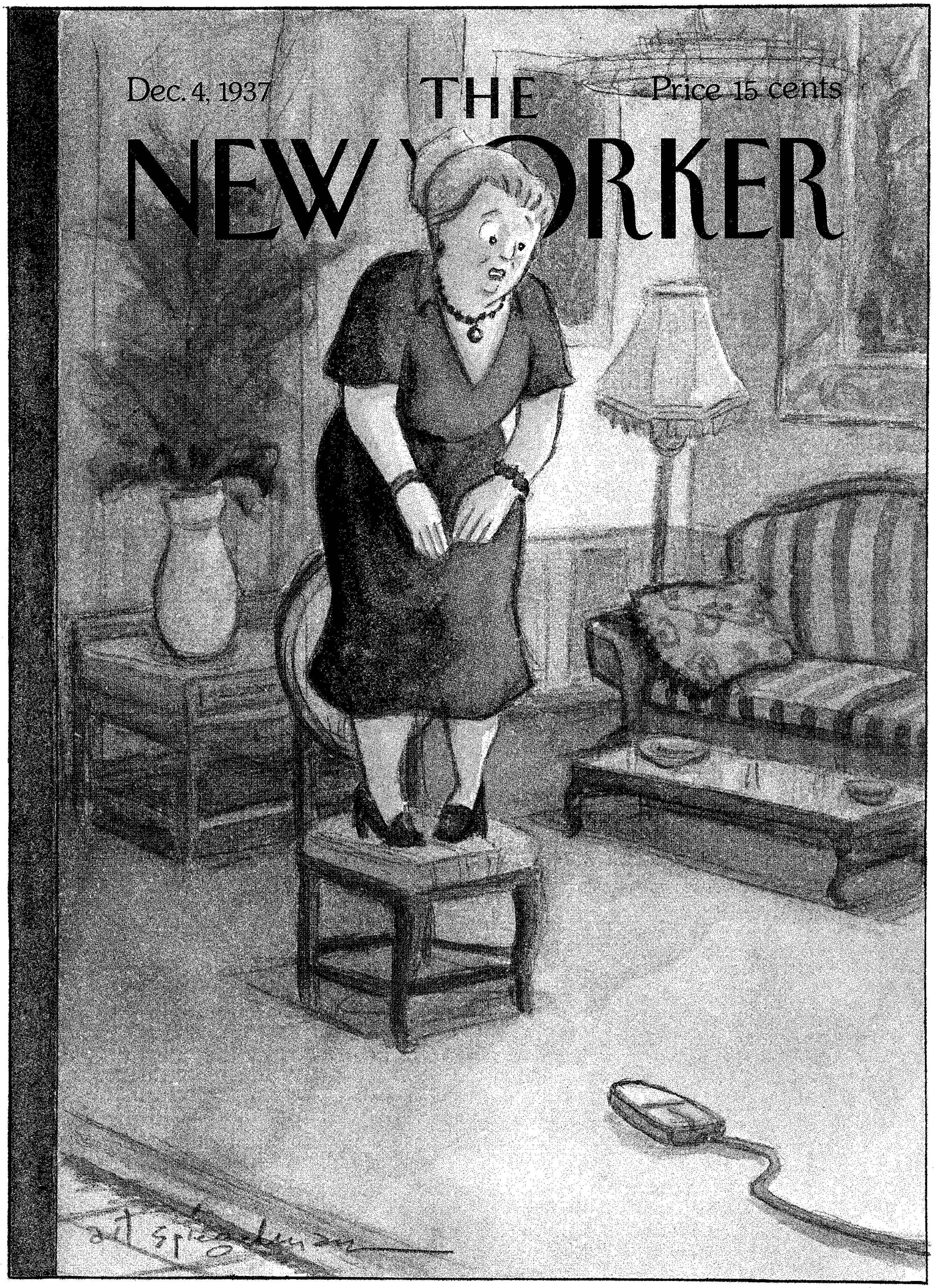
"One of the big fallacies when the Internet came along was that you could get these huge savings by eliminating customer-service costs," Bill Bass, the head of E-commerce for Lands' End, says. "People thought the Internet was self-service, like a gas station. But there are some things that you cannot program a computer to provide. People will still have questions, and what you get are much higher-level questions. Like, 'Can you help me come up with a gift?' And they take longer."

Meanwhile, it turns out, Internet customers at Lands' End aren't much different from 800-number customers. Both groups average around a hundred dollars an order, and they have the same rate of returns. Call volume on the 800 numbers is highest on Mondays and Tuesdays, from ten in the morning until one in the afternoon. So is E-commerce volume. In the long term, of course, the hope is that the Web site will reduce dependence on the catalogue, and that would be a huge efficiency. Given that last year the company mailed two hundred and fifty million catalogues, costing about a dollar each, the potential savings could be enormous. And yet customers' orders on the Internet spike just after a new catalogue arrives at people's homes in exactly the same way that the 800-number business spikes just after the catalogue arrives. E-commerce users, it seems, need the same kind of visual, tangible prompting to use Lands' End as traditional customers. If Lands' End did all its business over the Internet, it would still have to send out something in the mail—a postcard or a bunch of fabric swatches or a slimmed-down catalogue. "We thought going into E-commerce it would be a different business," Tracy Schmit, an Internet analyst at the company, says. "But it's the same business, the same patterns, the same contacts. It's an extension of what we already do."

NOW consider what happens on what retailers call the "back end"—the customer-fulfillment side—of Lands' End's operations. Say you go to the company's Web site one afternoon and order a blue 32-16 oxford-cloth button-down shirt and a pair of size-9 Top-Siders. At midnight, the computer at Lands' End combines your order with all the other orders for the day: it lumps your shirt order with the hundred other orders, say, that came in for 32-16 blue oxford-cloth button-downs, and lumps your shoe order with the fifty other size-9 Top-Sider orders of the day. It then prints bar codes for every item, so each of those hundred shirts is assigned a sticker listing the location of blue oxford 32-16 shirts in the warehouse, the order that it belongs to, shipping information, and instructions for things like monogramming.

The next morning, someone known as a "picker" finds the hundred oxford-cloth shirts in that size, yours among them, and puts a sticker on each one, as does another picker in the shoe area with the fifty size-9 Top-Siders. Each piece of merchandise is placed on a yellow plastic tray along an extensive conveyor belt, and as the belt passes underneath a bar-code scanner the computer reads the label and assembles your order. The tray with your shirt on it circles the room until it is directly above a bin that has been temporarily assigned to you, and then tilts, sending the package sliding downward. Later, when your shoes come gliding along on the belt, the computer reads the bar code on the box and sends the shoe box tumbling into the same bin. Then the merchandise is packed and placed on another conveyor belt, and a bar-code scanner sorts the packages once again, sending the New York-bound packages to the New York-bound U.P.S. truck, the Detroit packages to the Detroit truck, and so on.

It's an extraordinary operation. When you stand in the middle of the Lands' End warehouse—while shirts and pants and sweaters and ties roll by at a rate that, at Christmas, can reach twenty-five thousand items an hour—you feel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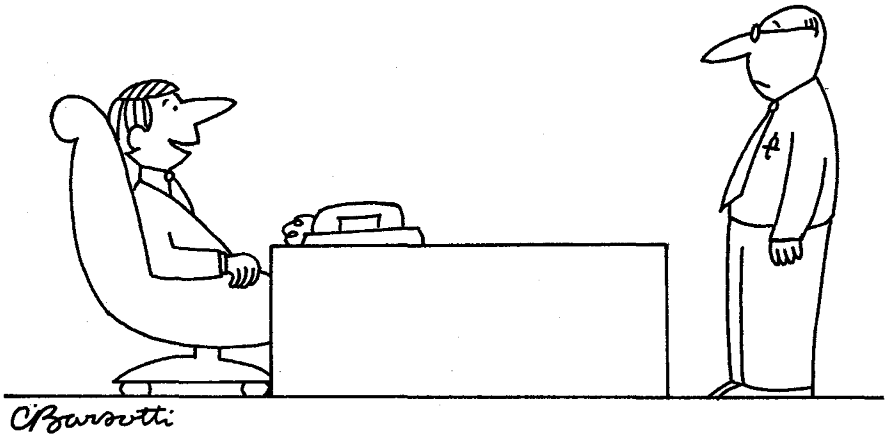

"Gosh, I wish somebody would tell me to take early retirement."

• •

as if you're in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. The warehouses are enormous buildings—as big, in all, as sixteen football fields—and the conveyor belts hang from the ceiling like giant pieces of industrial sculpture. Every so often, a belt lurches to a halt, and a little black scanner box reads the bar code and sends the package off again, directing it left or right or up or down, onto any number of separate sidings and overpasses. In the middle of one of the buildings, there is another huge room where thousands of pants, dangling from a jumbo-sized railing like a dry cleaner's rack, are sorted by color (so sewers don't have to change thread as often) and by style, then hemmed, pressed, bagged, and returned to the order-fulfillment chain—all within a day.

This system isn't unique to Lands' End. If you went to L. L. Bean or J. Crew or, for that matter, a housewares-catalogue company like Pottery Barn, you'd find the same kind of system. It's what all modern, automated warehouses look like, and it is as much a part of E-commerce as a Web site. In fact, it is the more difficult part of E-commerce. Consider the problem of the Christmas rush. Lands' End records something like thirty per cent of its sales during November and December. A well-supported Web site can easily handle those extra hits, but for the rest of the operation that surge in business represents a considerable strain. Lands' End, for example, aims to respond to every phone call or Lands' End Live query within twenty seconds, and to ship out every order within twenty-four hours of its receipt. In August, those goals are easily met. But, to maintain that level of service in November and December, Lands' End must hire an extra twenty-six hundred people, increasing its normal payroll by more than fifty per cent. Since unemployment in the Madison area is hovering around one per cent, this requires elaborate planning: the company charters buses to bring in students from a nearby college, and has made a deal in the past with a local cheese factory to borrow its workforce for the rush. Employees from other parts of the company are conscripted to help out as pickers, while others act as "runners" in the customer-service department, walking up and down the aisles and jumping into any seat made vacant by someone taking a break. Even the structure of the warehouse is driven, in large part, by the demands of the holiday season. Before the popularization of the bar code, in the early nineteen-eighties, Lands' End used what is called an "order picking" method. That meant that the picker got your ticket, then went to the shirt room and got your shirt, and the shoe room and got your shoes, then put your order together. If another shoe-and-shirt order came over next, she would have to go back to the shirts and back to the shoes all over again. A good picker under the old system could pick between a hundred and fifty and a hundred and seventy-five pieces an hour. The new technique, known as "batch picking," is so much more efficient that a good picker can now retrieve between six hundred and seven hundred pieces an hour. Without bar codes, if you placed an order in mid-December, you'd be hard pressed to get it by Christmas.

None of this is to minimize the significance of the Internet. Lands' End has a feature on its Web site which allows you to try clothes on a virtual image of yourself—a feature that is obviously not possible with a catalogue. The Web site can list all the company's merchandise, whereas a catalogue has space to list only a portion of the inventory. But how big a role does the Internet ultimately play in E-commerce? It doesn't much affect the cost of running a customer-service department. It reduces catalogue costs, but it doesn't eliminate traditional marketing, because you still have to remind people of your Web site. You still need to master batch picking. You still need the Willy Wonka warehouse. You still need dozens of sewers in the inseaming department, and deals with the local cheese factory, and buses to ship in students every November and December. The head of operations for Lands' End is a genial man in his fifties named Phil Schaecher, who works out of a panelled office decorated with paintings of ducks which overlooks the warehouse floor. When asked what he would do if he had to choose between the two great innovations of the past twenty years—the bar code, which has transformed the back end of his business, and the Internet, which is transforming the front end—Schaecher paused, for what seemed a long time. "I'd take the Internet," he said finally, toeing the line that all retailers follow these days. Then he smiled. "But of course if we lost bar codes I'd retire the next day."

On a recent fall morning, a young woman named Charlene got a call from a shipping agent at a firm in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Charlene is a dispatcher with a trucking company in Akron, Ohio, called Roberts Express. She sits in front of a computer with a telephone headset on, in a large crowded room filled with people in front of computers wearing headsets, not unlike the large crowded room at Lands' End. The shipping agent told Charlene that she had to get seven drums of paint to Muskegon, Michigan, as soon as possible. It was 11:25 A.M. Charlene told the agent she would call her back, and immediately typed those details into her computer, which relayed the message to the two-way-communications satellite that serves as the backbone for the Roberts transportation network. The Roberts satellite, in turn, "pinged" the fifteen hundred independent truckers that Roberts works with, and calculated how far each available vehicle was from the customer in Oak Creek. Those data were then analyzed by proprietary software, which sorted out the cost of the job and the distance between Muskegon and Oak Creek, and sifted through more than fifteen variables governing the optimal distribution of the fleet.

This much—the satellite relay and the probability calculation—took a matter of seconds. The trip, Charlene's screen told her, was two hundred and seventy-four miles and would cost seven hundred and twenty-six dollars. The computer also gave her twenty-three candidates for the run, ranked in order of preference. The first, Charlene realized, was ineligible, because federal regulations limit the number of hours drivers can spend on the road. The second, she found out, was being held for another job. The third, according to the satellite, was fifty miles away, which was too far. But the fourth, a husband-and-wife team named Jerry and Ann Love, seemed ideal. They were just nineteen miles from Oak Creek. "I've worked with them before," Charlene said. "They're really nice people." At eleven-twenty-seven, Charlene sent the Loves an E-mail message, via satellite, that would show up instantly on the computer screens Roberts installs in the cabs of all its contractors. According to Roberts' rules, they had ten minutes to respond. "I'm going to give them a minute or two," Charlene said. There was no answer, so she called the Loves on their cell phone. Ann Love answered. "We'll do that," she said. Charlene chatted with her for a moment and then, as an afterthought, E-mailed the Loves again: "Thank you!" It was eleven-thirty.

"I know he's in here somewhere!"

Trucking companies didn't work this way twenty years ago. But Roberts uses its state-of-the-art communications and computer deployment to give the shipping business a new level of precision. If your pickup location is within twenty-five miles of one of the company's express centers—and Roberts has express centers in most major North American cities—Roberts will pick up a package of almost any size within ninety minutes, and it will do so twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. If the cargo is located between twenty-six and fifty miles of an express center, it will be picked up within two hours. More than half of those deliveries will be made by midnight of the same day. Another twenty-five per cent will be made by eight o'clock the next morning. Ninety-six per cent of all Roberts deliveries are made within fifteen minutes of the delivery time promised when the order is placed. Because of its satellite system, the company knows precisely, within yards, where your order is at all times. The minute the computer tells her your truck is running fifteen minutes behind, Charlene or one of her colleagues will call you to work out some kind of solution. Roberts has been known to charter planes or send in Huey helicopters to rescue time-sensitive cargo stranded in traffic or in a truck that has broken down. The result is a truck-based system so efficient that Roberts estimates it can outperform air freight at distances of up to seven hundred or eight hundred miles.

Roberts, of course, isn't the only company to reinvent the delivery business over the past twenty years. In the same period, Federal Express has put together, from scratch, a network of six hundred and forty-three planes, forty-three thousand five hundred vehicles, fourteen hundred service centers, thirty-four thousand drop boxes, and a hundred and forty-eight thousand employees—all coordinated by satellite links and organized around a series of huge, automated, bar-code-driven Willy Wonka warehouses. Federal Express was even a pioneer in the development of aircraft antifog navigational equipment: if it absolutely, positively has to get there overnight, the weather can't be allowed to get in the way.

E-commerce would be impossible without this extraordinary infrastructure. Would you care that you could order a new wardrobe with a few clicks of a mouse if the package took a couple of weeks to get to you? Lands' End has undergone three major changes over the past couple of decades. The first was the introduction of an 800 number, in 1978; the second was express delivery, in 1994; and the third was the introduction of a Web site, in 1995. The first two innovations cut the average transaction time—the time between the moment of ordering and the moment the goods are received—from three weeks to four days. The third innovation has cut the transaction time from four days to, well, four days.

It isn't just that E-commerce depends on express mail; there's a sense in which E-commerce *is* express mail. Right now, billions of dollars are being spent around the country on so-called "last-mile delivery systems." Companies such as Webvan, in San Francisco, or Kozmo.com, in New York, are putting together networks of trucks and delivery personnel which can reach almost any home in their area within an hour. What if Webvan or Kozmo were somehow integrated into a huge, national, Roberts-style network of connected trucks? And what if that network were in turn integrated into the operations of a direct merchant like Lands' End? There may soon come a time when a customer from Northampton could order some shirts on LandsEnd.com at the height of the Christmas rush, knowing that the retailer's computer could survey its stock, assess its warehouse capabilities, "ping" a network of thousands of trucks it has at its disposal, look up how many other orders are going to his neck of the woods, check in with his local Kozmo or Webvan, and tell him, right then and there, precisely what time it could deliver those shirts to him that evening or the next morning. It's not hard to imagine, under such a system, that Lands' End's sales would soar; the gap between the instant gratification of a real store and the delayed gratification of a virtual store would narrow even further. It would be a revolution of sorts, a revolution of satellites, probability models, people in headsets, cell phones, truckers, logistics experts, bar codes, deals with the local cheese factory, and—oh yes, the Internet.

The interesting question, of course, is why we persist in identifying the E-commerce boom as an Internet revolution. Part of the reason, perhaps, is simply the convenience of the word "Internet" as a shorthand for all the technological wizardry of the last few decades. But surely whom and what we choose to celebrate in any period of radical change says something about the things we value. This fall, for example, the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company—a firm with sales of more than thirteen billion dollars—was dropped from the Dow Jones industrial average. After all, Goodyear runs factories, not Web sites. It is based in Akron, not in Silicon Valley. It is part of the highway highway, not the information highway. The manufacturing economy of the early twentieth century, from which Goodyear emerged, belonged to trade unions and blue-collar men. But ours is the first economic revolution in history that the educated classes have sought to claim as wholly their own, a revolution of Kevin Kelly's "communication" and Bill Gates's "thought"—the two activities for which the Net-Geners believe themselves to be uniquely qualified. Today's talkers and thinkers value the conception of ideas, not their fulfillment. They give credit to the catalogue, but not to the postman who delivered it, or to the road he travelled on. The new economy was supposed to erase all hierarchies. Instead, it has devised another one. On the front end, there are visionaries. On the back end, there are drones.

ONE of the very first packages ever delivered by parcel post, in 1913, was an eight-pound crate of apples sent from New Jersey to President Wilson at the White House. The symbolism of that early delivery was deliberate. When the parcel post was established, the assumption was that it would be used by farmers as a way of sending their goods

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IN HOSPITAL

I'm an old fool in the guise
of a trusting old fool
and I lie here at one
with a host of other women
somewhere between what we are
and what we think we are

and I think I hear the waves
hurrying inshore one after the other,
the fetch of a thousand
thousand waves of generation
and I wonder what are the rules
when the biological part is over
in a world that's a limited whole
and its sides contract
to a women's ward in the hospital

Someone still young
cries in her husband's arms
She came in during the night
I think they've lost their baby,
the woman in her coarse cotton shift
open down the back like a split husk
and the man fully clothed and buttoned and shod

Orpheus who'll return, Eurydice
bound to go under the night with the dead unborn

Better look at the north sky
and a row of terrace houses
on the far side of the railway line
where the Scarborough train slips past hourly,
two silver carriages with a blue stripe
And here is a cheerful monitoring voice
announcing a menu for lunch
(the nurses have been up for hours,
running like flightless birds
in little flat shoes and cockatoo caps)

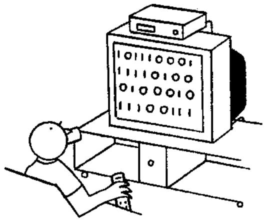
And now the surgeon appears
in a graceful *palais* glide
debonair   a little smile   a nice conspiracy
He sits on each bed and explains
he's transferring his power to us
Who knew the future could be so clear?
Now someone is turning us over one by one
with the dispassionate hand of a beachcomber
Someone will trim us to the bare root
Oh, why can't I rejoice at being taken up?

—Mairi MacInnes

cheaply and directly to customers in the city. "Let us imagine that the Gotham family," one journalist wrote at the time,

> immured in the city by the demands of Father Gotham's business, knew that twice a week during the summer they could get from Farmer Ruralis, forty miles out in the country, a hamper of fresh-killed poultry, green peas, string beans, asparagus, strawberries, lettuce, cherries, summer squash, and what not; that the "sass" would be only a day from garden to table; that prices would be lower than market prices; that the cost of transportation would be only thirty-five cents in and, say, eleven cents for the empty hamper back again. Would the Gotham family be interested?

The Post Office told rural mailmen to gather the names and addresses of all those farmers along their routes who wanted to sell their produce by mail. Those lists were given to city mailmen, who delivered them along their routes, so interested customers could get in contact with interested farmers directly. Because customers wanted to know what kind of produce each farmer had to sell, local postmasters began including merchandise information on their lists, essentially creating a farm-produce mail-order catalogue. A California merchant named David Lubin proposed a scheme whereby a farmer would pick up colored cards from the post office—white for eggs, pink for chickens, yellow for butter—mark each card with his prices, and mail the cards back. If he had three chickens that week for a dollar each, he would mail three pink cards to the post office. There they would be put in a pigeonhole with all the other pink cards. Customers could come by and comparison shop, pick out the cards they liked, write their address on these cards, and have the postal clerk mail them back to the farmer. It was a pre-digital eBay. The scheme was adopted in and around Sacramento, and Congress appropriated ten thousand dollars to try a similar version of it on a large scale.



At about the same time, an assistant Postmaster General, James Blakslee, had the bright idea of putting together a fleet of parcel-post trucks, which would pick up farm produce from designated spots along the main roads and ship it directly to town. Blakslee laid out four thousand miles of produce routes around the country, to be covered by fifteen hundred parcel-post trucks. In 1918, in the system's inaugural run, four thousand day-old chicks, two hundred pounds of honey, five hundred pounds of smoked sausage, five hundred pounds of butter, and eighteen thousand eggs were carried from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to New York City, all for $31.60 in postage. New York's Secretary of State called it "an epoch in the history of the United States and the world."

Only, it wasn't. The Post Office had devised a wonderful way of communicating between farmer and customer. But there is more to a revolution than communication, and within a few years the farm-to-table movement, which started out with such high hopes, was dead. The problem was that Blakslee's trucks began to break down, which meant that the food on board spoiled. Eggs proved hard to package, and so they often arrived damaged. Butter went rancid. In the winter of 1919-20, Blakslee collected a huge number of orders for potatoes, but, as Wayne Fuller writes in his wonderful history of the era, "RFD: The Changing Face of Rural America," the potatoes that year

> were scarce, and good ones even scarcer, and when Blakslee's men were able to buy them and attempted delivery, nothing but trouble followed. Some of the potatoes were spoiled to begin with; some froze in transit; prices varied, deliveries went astray, and customers complained loudly enough for Congress to hear. One harried official wrote Blakslee that he could "fill the mails with complaints from people who have ordered potatoes from October to December." . . . Some people had been waiting over four months, either to have the potatoes delivered or their money refunded.

Parcel post, in the end, turned out to be something entirely different from what was originally envisioned—a means not to move farm goods from country to town but to move consumer goods from town to country. That is the first lesson from the revolution of a hundred years ago, and it's one that should give pause to all those eager to pronounce on the significance of the Internet age: the nature of revolutions is such that you never really know what they mean until they are over. The other lesson, of course, is that coming up with a new way of connecting buyers and sellers is a very fine thing, but what we care about most of all is getting our potatoes. ♦

LETTER FROM LONDON

THE BLAIR PROJECT

Can Britain's youthful Prime Minister drag his countrymen into the digital age?

BY JOHN CASSIDY

On a wet and windy Sunday morning not long ago, about ten thousand people, many of them wearing green waxed-cotton jackets, corduroy trousers, Wellington boots, and "Back Off, Blair!" badges, descended on the Norfolk Showground, a big, muddy pasture about ten miles outside Norwich, in deepest East Anglia. They stood there in the rain for several hours, listening to speeches, eating hog-roast sandwiches, taking snifters from hip flasks, and generally signalling their outrage at the suggestion that they no longer be allowed to go foxhunting, a hallowed pursuit of the English upper classes that involves dressing up in strange outfits, blowing through brass pipes, and shouting "Tallyho!" and "Gone to ground!" Oscar Wilde once described foxhunting as "the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable," and Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, has declared that such an archaic and cruel "sport" has no place in the shiny New Britain he is trying to create. With the Conservative Party in serious trouble, the most organized and effective opposition to Blair over the last year or so has come from the Countryside Alliance, a coalition of rural groups opposed to the foxhunting ban. About two hundred and fifty thousand alliance supporters rallied in London last spring, and about twenty thousand marched through Bournemouth several weeks ago during the annual Labour Party Conference.

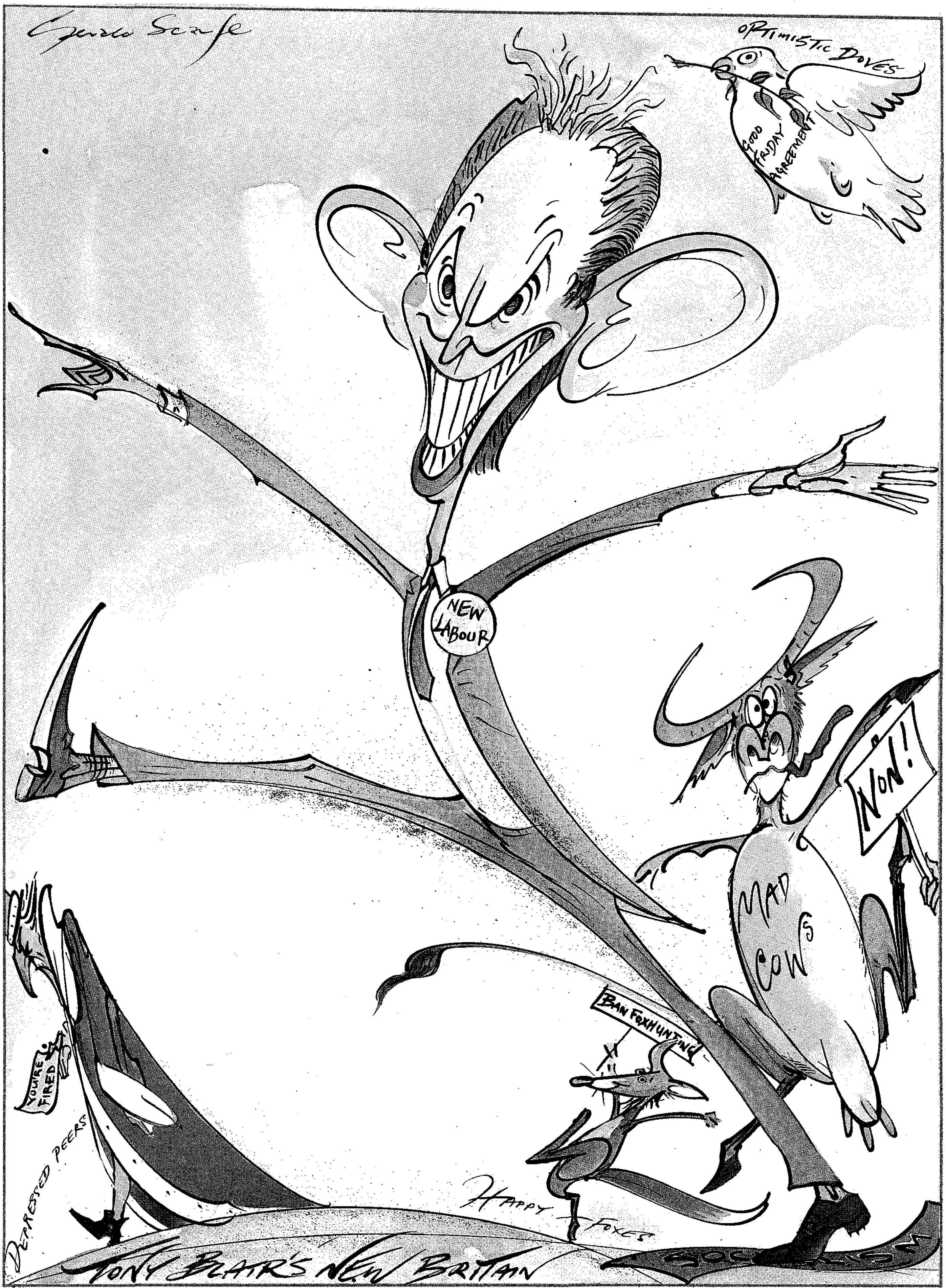
"People say, 'It's just foxhunting,' but it isn't," Don Rose, a beefy veteran of the King's Artillery, who stood out from the multitude in his Derby tweed, plus fours, and garter socks, told me angrily. "First, it will be hunting—then it will be everything else." Rose said he has given up chasing foxes since he "keeled over," early last year, from a "dodgy ticker," but he still hunts regularly on foot, for deer and ducks. If somebody didn't put a stop to this nonsense, he continued, hunters would end up being forced to keep their rifles locked up in the local police station, and then where would we be? "I just hope there's a copper there at three-thirty in the morning when I need to get into the woods by five."

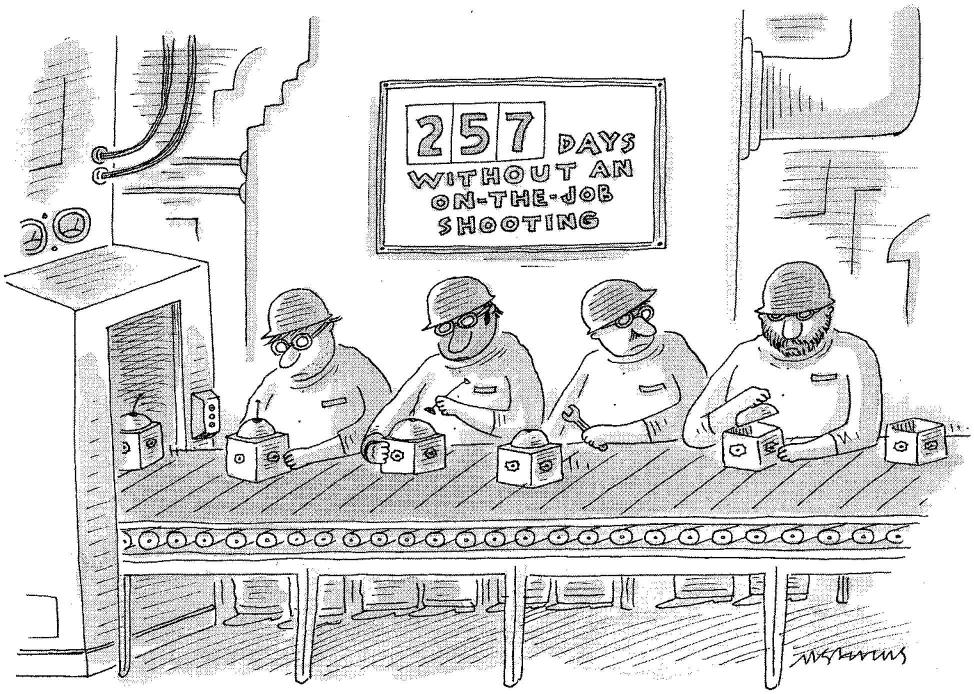
The speakers included Robin Page, the host of "One Man and His Dog," a popular television program about sheep farming; Sir Mark Prescott, a well-known racehorse trainer; and Baroness Mallalieu, a plummy-voiced Labour peer who said the Government was set to "reap a whirlwind." After a while, I walked behind the stage and spoke to Richard Burge, the chief executive of the Countryside Alliance. "Tony Blair and the Labour Party made a huge error," Burge told me. "Hunting is a talisman for these people. They are sick of being used as a political football. This is People Power. There are no toffs out there—or not many, anyway." Burge may have somewhat exaggerated the populist nature of his organization—it has received support from, among others, John Paul Getty and Lord Faringdon, the Queen's lord-in-waiting—but there is no doubt that many ordinary rural folk deeply resent the prospect of having their pastimes criminalized by what they view as an arrogant urban élite. When the speeches were over, a local vicar took the stage to assure the crowd that God was with them, and to lead a stirring version of "Jerusalem," William Blake's ode to the English countryside. On my way back to the railway station, I hitched a ride from a white-haired grandmother who told me that she was attending her first demo. "If they send me to jail," she said, "I'll go with Robin Page, and we'll have a jolly good time!"

A couple of days later, when I brought up the subject of foxhunting in the Prime Minister's spare study at 10 Downing Street, Tony Blair seemed a little irritated. "As I've said to people before, I am not going to sit here and pretend that the issue of foxhunting is the great question of the twenty-first century, because that would be fatuous," he said, in a resigned tone. The proposed ban is not even official Government policy; it derives from a bill put forward by a Labour Party backbencher in the House of Commons, he pointed out. It is easy to sympathize with Blair's predicament. Since assuming power two and a half years ago, the Prime Minister has made it his "Project" to modernize Britain as thoroughly and effectively as he previously modernized the Labour Party. Banning foxhunting is, at most, a sideshow to the Project, but, thanks to the Countryside Alliance, it has taken on a symbolic importance far outweighing its real significance. If Blair backs down now, he will have suffered his first defeat at the hands of old Britain. If he pushes ahead, the hunting ban may not go through anyway, since many Labourites privately believe it is a waste of time and energy. ("It's bullshit," one of them told me. "I don't know why we got involved with it in the first place.") Several people had suggested to me that the Government became interested in banning foxhunting only because animal-rights groups contributed heavily to the Labour Party before the general election. When I put this to the Prime Minister, his patience snapped. "The animal-rights people gave money to the Tories as well, and to other political parties," he said sharply. "If you go and do an opinion poll of people in this country, or go and look in my mailbag, you'll see that there are very large numbers of people who feel very deeply on the issue of animal welfare. I don't mistake the strength of the feelings of some of the people who are marching, and who want to carry on foxhunting, but they shouldn't misunderstand or mistake the strength of feeling on the other side."

The last time I had seen Blair was in the early hours of May 2, 1997, when his New Labour Party had just won an electoral landslide, ending eighteen years of Conservative rule. To many

GERALD SCARFE


Gerald Scarfe
OPTIMISTIC DOVES
GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT
NEW LABOUR
NON!
MAD COWS
BAN FOXHUNTING
YOU'RE FIRED
DEPRESSED PEERS
HAPPY FOXES
SOCIALISM
TONY BLAIR'S NEW BRITAIN


257 DAYS WITHOUT AN ON-THE-JOB SHOOTING

Britons, and not just traditional Labour voters, the youthful victor, with his brainy wife, his three attractive children (with another now on the way), and his modernizing creed, seemed to be just what the country needed. (Even the man who lost the election, John Major, seemed relieved at the result.) Thirty months on, Blair is midway through what most people in Westminster think will be the first of two, or even three, terms in office. At forty-six, he is just as energetic and fidgety as ever, but he looks a good deal older than he did in May, 1997. The gray patches in his hair are no longer flecks; the creases around his eyes no longer mere spider's legs. His hairline is receding, and he even admits to losing the occasional night's sleep.

Blair is the most popular Prime Minister of the twentieth century, and his party is anywhere between nineteen and twenty-five points clear of the Conservatives, depending on which polling organization you believe. The British economy is performing well: unemployment is at a twenty-year low, inflation is restrained, and the budget is in surplus. Since arriving at Downing Street, Blair has delivered national assemblies for Scotland and Wales, helped lead the international effort to push Slobodan Milosevic's forces out of Kosovo, and—for now, at least—defused the explosive issue that destroyed Major and, before him, Margaret Thatcher: Britain's relations with its partners in the European Union. When Blair met his opposite numbers from the United States, Germany, France, and Italy in Florence recently, at a so-called Third Way summit, he could plausibly claim to be the primus inter pares of center-left reformers. (Bill Clinton, once Blair's role model, is now a lame-duck President. Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, is on political crutches. Lionel Jospin and Massimo D'Alema, the French and Italian leaders, are in good shape, but both of them are Blair's juniors in office.)

Most Prime Ministers would be content with this record, but Blair wants to be remembered not just as a great politician but as the Prime Minister who put the "Great" back into Great Britain. At the Labour Party's Bournemouth Conference, he spoke of his "historic mission" to "liberate Britain from the old class divisions, old structures, old prejudices, old ways of working and of doing things, that will not do in this world of change," and he coupled this messianic language with an attack on the "forces of conservatism" that have held the country back. Many Conservatives interpreted the speech as a direct assault on them, but Blair wasn't referring solely to his political opponents—a point he stressed when I asked him to identify the recalcitrants. "There are forces of conservatism left and right," he said, pointing to the traditional Labour supporters who have opposed his attempts to reform public education, welfare, and the National Health Service. Many of the left-wing intellectuals who hailed Blair's rise to power have now soured on his Project, as have some traditionally conservative newspapers that initially supported it, such as the *Daily Mail*. Even some prominent figures within his own party, such as Roy Hattersley, a former Deputy Leader, have attacked Blair: many of them accuse him of being "a control freak," and of turning his back on worthy Labour traditions. The majority of Britain's sixty million inhabitants may still support the Prime Minister, but they aren't nearly as loud or vociferous as his critics.

All serious reformers excite opposition, of course; and dragging an ancient and cussed country into the twenty-first century was never going to be easy. Blair is often compared to Mrs. Thatcher, the reformist grocer's daughter who lived at 10 Downing Street from 1979 to 1990, but that is an oversimplification. Mrs. Thatcher largely confined her modernizing activities to the economic sphere, where she emasculated the trade unions, privatized large swaths of industry that had previously been publicly owned, and deregulated the financial system. Blair has embraced Mrs. Thatcher's economic reforms, to be sure, but he has combined them with a much broader agenda. "I think there are two waves of reform," he told me, leaning back in his Queen Anne chair and clasping his hands above his head. "At the end of the seventies, what did people feel here and in the United States? Too much bureaucracy, too much government, too much interference, high personal rates of tax. Mrs. Thatcher took on a lot of these things. But the second wave of reform is different. The second wave is about a first-class education system, the challenge of new technology, reforming our welfare system so that we defeat social exclusion and encourage work for those who can, security for those who can't. Finding Britain's place in the world—you know, giving us a sense of a well-functioning civic society as well as a dynamic economy."

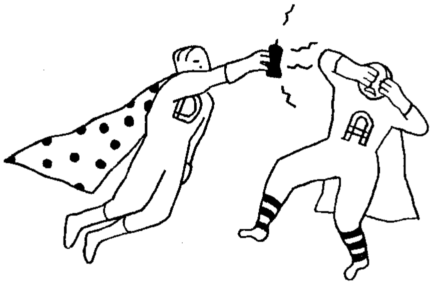
While Thatcher was the most polarizing Prime Minister of this century, Blair is an instinctively inclusive politician. At times, indeed, he sounds more like a grief counsellor than like the sharp-tongued handbag-wielder who referred to striking coal miners as "the enemy within" and to moderate Conservatives as "wets." "Britain is a great country that has been through the pain of losing an empire, of having started this century as probably the superpower of the world," Blair told me, his hands now clasped in front of him, as if in prayer. Britain is never going to recover its empire or become a superpower again, he continued, but it can become a "country of strength and influence," and a "beacon to the world in terms of its economic dynamism and its sense of social solidarity." To do that, given the current pace of economic and technological change, the country would have to transform itself. "And that is my sense of mission."

NOT for nothing does *Private Eye*, the weekly satirical magazine, lampoon the Prime Minister as the Reverend A. R. P. Blair, the well-meaning but pious vicar of a country parish. The first task facing him was to establish his Government's competence. All but one of the five previous Labour Governments had ended in failure, usually economic failure. The standard script for a Labour term of office involved a hopeful Prime Minister arriving in Downing Street, armed with a sackful of ambitious proposals, only to spend most of his time trying to prevent the bottom from falling out of the economy. In 1931, 1947, 1967, and 1976, it was a sterling crisis that blind-sided Labour; in 1969 and 1979 it was a crisis involving the unions. By the time Blair arrived on the scene, the phrase "Labour Government" had come to be translated in the minds of many voters as "well-meaning but incompetent."

Even before the last election, Gordon Brown, Blair's Chancellor of the Exchequer, who works next door, at 11 Downing Street, had ruled out raising income taxes or reversing the Conservatives' policies on privatization and deregulation. Brown also committed himself to the Major Government's spending targets for two years. Five days after the election, Brown surprised the country by announcing the Bank of England's independence, thereby giving up the Government's capacity to manipulate the economy by raising or lowering interest rates in the short term. So far, at least, Brown's dramatic move has appeared inspired. Twelve months ago, there were fears that a recession might be developing, but the newly independent central bank cut interest rates repeatedly in order to spur spending. ("If *we* had cut rates seven times, the markets would have gone berserk," a senior Treasury official told me.) The economy is now growing—so strongly that the bank has recently nudged interest rates back up a little. The pound sterling, far from plummeting on the foreign exchanges, as it had done in the past, has risen strongly, an indication that international investors have confidence in New Labour. And real-estate prices, an important political variable in a country obsessed by bricks and mortar, are rising steadily.

If this were all that New Labor had done, the jibes that it is a good Tory government might be justified. Blair publicly rejoices that he has, in Gordon Brown, an "Iron Chancellor," but government spending on the National Health Service and education is budgeted to rise sharply over the next few years; and a number of programs aimed at the needy have been introduced. Blair has taken one step in the direction of Victorian values, forcing some welfare recipients to take jobs or attend training courses on pain of losing their benefits, but he has also introduced a national minimum wage (£3.60, or about six dollars) and increased the level of state handouts to families with children, senior citizens, and low-paid workers. New Labour officials are loath to describe these policies as "redistributionary," but since the policies take money from the taxpayers at large and transfer it to people who earn little or nothing, they cannot really be described as anything else. "The crucial thing is to establish a platform of over-all stability and a strong degree of trust in the financial markets," the Treasury official told me. "If you do that, it buys you room to do the right things in other areas."

Blair seldom mentions inequality, still less Socialism, the levelling philosophy that many Labour Party members still believe in. ("Socialism, to any modern British person on the center left, is a set of values, a belief in community and social justice—it is social-ism," he told me. "Socialism as a form of economic organization linked to state control of business is dead.") But the Prime Minister isn't oblivious of socioeconomic reality. One of his advisers, Andrew Adonis, recently wrote a book, "A Class Act," that aimed to "explode the fashionable notion that Britain is becoming a classless society." Adonis and a co-author, Stephen Pollard, pointed out that income inequality has risen sharply in Britain since 1979, that social mobility is no higher than it was during the Industrial Revolution, and that a new "super class," based on élite boarding schools and the City of London, is fast emerging. When I asked Blair how the evidence presented by Adonis and Pollard chimed with his recent statement at the Labour Party Conference that "the class war is over," he looked at me as if I were a bit simple. "The class war is over, but that is not to say there isn't still class division," he said testily. "You are not going to liberate the potential of the people who are down at the bottom of the heap by waging war on the middle class today. That is not what the game is about at all."



THE Prime Minister likes to describe himself as being part of the "radical center." If there is any truth in this oxymoron, it lies in his attempt to overhaul Britain's ancient, but unwritten, constitution. The day that I interviewed the Prime Minister, his bill to deprive the landed aristocracy of its automatic right to sit in the upper House of Parliament received its third and final reading, and, after leaving Downing Street, I walked down Whitehall to Parliament Square. The House of Lords dates back to the fourteenth century, and is a central fixture of the British class system. More than half of its thirteen hundred and twenty-six members are hereditary peers, who are there solely by virtue of their surnames. (The rest are life peers, appointed by the Government, and bishops appointed by the Church of England.) Since Lloyd George, another modernizer, precipitated the Parliament Act of 1911, the power of the Lords has been restricted to delaying certain bills passed by the House of Commons—initially for up to two years, later reduced to one. On normal business days, the chamber often resembles a retirement home, with a dozen or so aged peers lolling around on red leather benches. Nonetheless, the fact that so many viscounts, earls, marquesses, and barons still had the right to sit in Parliament was an obvious anomaly in a country attempting to present itself as a beacon of modernity.

Blair initially vowed to get rid of all the hereditary peers. Earlier this year, under the threat of filibustering, he agreed to grant ninety-two of them a temporary reprieve while a Royal Commission contemplates the composition of a reformed Lords. The bill that was making its way through Parliament encapsulated this compromise; if it passed, more than five hundred and fifty hereditary peers would be gone within a month. (The rest will almost certainly go following the Royal Commission report.)

The Lords tea room was packed when I arrived. My hostess, Baroness Thornton, entered the Lords last year as a Labour life peer and is part of the Government team working to oust the hereditaries. "I'm exactly what they hate," she told me cheerfully over tea and crumpets. "I live in Islington. I'm a Blairite and a woman." The talk of the assembled throng was the Earl of Burford, a bearded son of the Duke of St. Albans. Earlier in the afternoon, the Earl, who is only thirty-four, had leaped upon the woolsack—a large red beanbag, dating back to the reign of Edward III (1327-77), on which the Lord Chancellor, the presiding officer in the Lords, sits—and, arms akimbo, appealed to his colleagues to "Stand up for your Queen and country. Vote this treason down." This shouted intervention delighted my colleagues in the press gallery, especially when they discovered the Earl's name, Charles Francis Topham de Vere Beauclerk, and the fact that he is descended from the bastard son of Charles II and Nell Gwyn. But from his fellow-toffs it earned him only music-hall cries of "Get him off! Get him off!" Lord Onslow, who happened to be standing nearby, tried in vain to pull the protester from the woolsack. After the official bouncer of the Lords, who goes under the name Black Rod, arrived to do the job properly, the Earl went quietly and repaired to Brooks's, a gentlemen's club in St. James's.

The class that ruled Britain for centuries has lost its nerve and is now pathetically grateful for any reprieve, even a temporary one that condemns most of its members to oblivion. "Unless we can hang on to what we have," the Government will abolish all the hereditary peers forthwith, Viscount Cranborne, an Eton-and-Oxford-educated great-great-grandson of the Marquess of Salisbury, who was Prime Minister a century ago, warned his colleagues. A few voices were raised in favor of the hereditary principle, but they were desultory. Lord Elton, another Eton-and-Oxford man, pointed out that "seven hundred years ago, it was the barons who actually brought about the fact that we have a Parliament at all." Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, a former officer in the Coldstream Guards, rose to declare that if current trends continued Britain would soon be subject to "media rule, a mode espoused by Communists and Fascists alike." And Lord Wedgwood, whose family firm makes the crockery, inquired how long it would be, if the bill passed, "before the monarch is scuppered out of Buckingham Palace in the next step of the People's Republic of England."

Such admonitions were in vain. Shortly after ten o'clock, the Labour leader in the Lords, Baroness Jay of Paddington—the same svelte Margaret Jay who, twenty-odd years ago, scandalized Washington society by conducting an affair with Carl Bernstein while her then husband, Peter Jay, was the British Ambassador, and her father, James Callaghan, was the Prime Minister—rose to her feet and, in her most mellifluous tones, begged "to move that the bill do now pass." The measure was in no way intended to belittle the contribution of individual hereditary peers, many of whom have been "most distinguished and assiduous in their duties," Baroness Jay said, but "the time has come to wish them well and to say thank you and goodbye." After the votes were tallied, the Government had won by two hundred and twenty-one votes to eighty-one, and six hundred years of history had ended.

WHEN Blair was elected, it seemed possible that Lords reform would be accompanied by a shift to proportional representation in elections to the House of Commons, which would put an end to the two-party system. This now seems highly unlikely. The Prime Minister has proved just as reluctant as his predecessors to relinquish the power that the current voting arrangement, which is based on individual constituencies, bestows upon his office. (In 1997, Labour received forty-four per cent of the vote but gained sixty-three per cent of the seats in the Commons.) Indeed, Blair has been accused, even by some within his own party, of fostering an elected dictatorship, and the charge is not wholly without merit. ("Mr. Blair is a pluralist in principle and an autocrat in practice," the *Times* commented.) In recent weeks, for example, Downing Street involved itself in an unholy and ultimately futile effort to prevent Ken Livingstone, a veteran left-winger who goes under the sobriquet Red Ken, from presenting himself as a Labour Party candidate in the upcoming race to become London's first elected mayor. The traditional Cabinet system of government has been largely replaced by a neo-Presidential model. Blair works with a small cadre of ultra-loyalist aides based at 10 Downing Street, and major initiatives throughout the Government are driven from there. Cabinet Ministers are set individual performance targets and summoned to No. 10 for a grilling if the targets aren't met. They even have to clear their public statements with the Prime Minister's press office.

This may be a necessary precaution. The Blairite takeover of the Labour Party was a coup rather than a popular revolution. Most members of the Party, and many members of the Cabinet, are still somewhat reluctant converts to the modernizing cause. John Prescott, a gruff-voiced former union official who is in title, if not reality, Deputy Prime Minister, spoke for many when he dismissed the coterie of officials around Blair as "faceless wonders." Although the old Labour politicians are overjoyed to be in power after a generation in the wilderness, their delight is far from unalloyed, as I discovered over lunch with a junior minister recently. Marks & Spencer, the venerable retailer, had just announced that it was ending its contract with its biggest British clothing supplier in order to buy more cheaply from abroad. About seven thousand jobs and seventeen factories were at risk, a situation that in any previous Labour era would have led to calls for government intervention. Not this time. "It's the market," my dining companion said forlornly. "The market rules."

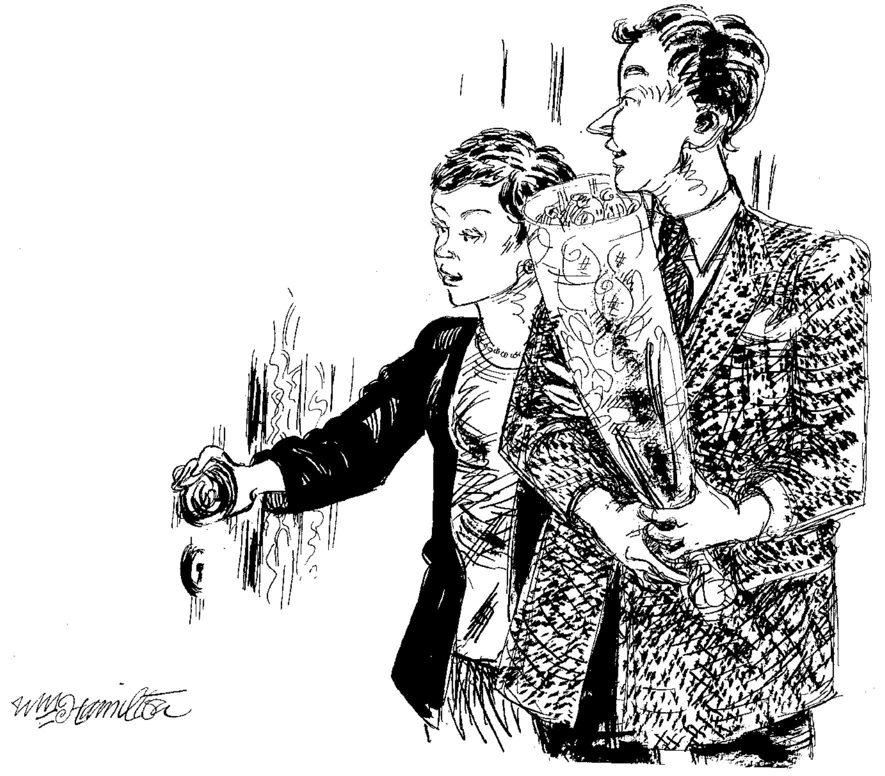
With power concentrated at the center, Blair alone sets the tone and the agenda for the Government. His latest passion is for the Internet. "If you look at the American economy today, it has been transformed, and I think the next ten years is going to be a faster transformation than the last ten," he told me. If the New Labour leader has one "big idea," it is that the key to future prosperity is "human capital," the skills and learning embodied in people. His Government has pledged to establish a nationwide network of "E-libraries," to rent computers cheaply to poor families, and to set up an on-line university. The Blairites imagine a future in which students will be able to log on and attend virtual classes, patients will be able to undergo medical consultations on-line, and unemployed workers will be able to find jobs without leaving their living rooms. If this vision is to become a reality, there will have to be major changes in the public-education system, the National Health Service, and the welfare system. The Government has already angered the public-sector unions, long a bedrock of Labour Party support, by introducing performance-related pay for teachers, allowing private firms to provide welfare services, and forcing hospitals to give patients specific times for appointments. (Previously, you had to turn up on the appointed date and wait your turn.)

The Prime Minister has seized upon a new book called "Living on Thin Air," by Charles Leadbeater, a British journalist and management consultant. Drawing on the work of American economists like Paul Romer and David Teece, Leadbeater argues that the key to prosperity in the information age is creating a society that is open to new ideas, in which all established institutions and élites are constantly challenged. "I think the government's problem, in the long run, will be that it is not modernizing enough," he writes. "It needs to go much, much further."

I met Leadbeater, a slight, pale figure with black glasses and a wry smile, who is in his late thirties, for lunch at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, practically a dining room for the Blairites, most of whom wouldn't be seen dead at Brooks's. (A few years ago, the I.C.A. helped promote the Y.B.A.s—Young British Artists—whose work caused such controversy in Brooklyn this fall, but it has now moved well beyond carcasses floating in formaldehyde. Fittingly, it was featuring a show of digital art, called "Imaginaria '99.") Leadbeater isn't formally connected to Downing Street, but he knows many of Blair's advisers well, including Gordon Brown. "The big question now is, What next?" he told me before dashing off to accompany the Prime Minister on a trip to the North. "Is it incrementalism, or can we make big changes to the structure of opportunity in this country? I think both Tony and Gordon are in the market for those sort of ideas."

In terms of economics, the Blair Government's enthusiasm for high technology is hard to argue with. The failure of British industry to translate research science into marketable technologies has long been a national scandal. Britons, after all, claim credit for inventing the internal-combustion engine, the mainframe, and the World Wide Web, but the country doesn't have a decent-sized automobile company or computer manufacturer to speak of. In political terms, though, Blair's emergence as an apostle of the Internet presents some dilemmas. For one thing, talk of an "E-commerce economy" and a "knowledge society" tends to turn off many voters. ("We did some focus groups, and they showed that most people think it means unless they have a white coat or a degree in physics they don't have a future," one Blairite told me.) For another thing, it turns out that the Prime Minister, despite his rhetoric, is a classic technophobe, who, in the words of one associate, "wouldn't know a mouse from a fishbowl."

After an upper-middle-class upbringing in Durham, a university town in the northeast, Blair attended Fettes, the Eton of Scotland, and then studied law at St. John's College, Oxford, where he also, famously, played in a rock band called the Ugly Rumours and, less famously, became a practicing member of the college chapel. After Oxford, he moved to London and trained to become a barrister. At no point in this impeccably old-fashioned education did he need, or apparently desire, to know much about technology. He can't type properly; he has only just bought a computer; and, until recently, he didn't know how to send E-mail. To his credit, Blair has finally faced up to this embarrassing inconsistency. Late last month, he attended a two-hour Internet lesson at a government-financed learning center in Newton Aycliffe, a small town in his Parliamentary constituency. "I have now communicated with the outside world," he announced proudly after dispatching



"If it slows down, just ask my father about the murder he always swears he did not commit."

his first E-mail. "I should have done this years ago, but just put it off. Computers have passed me by, and that's true of a lot of people in my generation. But there's no shame in learning at any age." Susie Emerson, the twenty-eight-year-old tutor who gave the Prime Minister his lesson, tried not to sound patronizing about his performance. "It was one or two fingers, and it did look a bit uncomfortable once or twice, but he was very quick to learn," she said.

INFORMATION AGE or no, London is still a city perpetually drowning in newsprint. Every weekday morning, eleven national newspapers hit the newsstands, and most of them have little interest in E-commerce, education policy, or the other subjects that the Downing Street Press Office would like them to focus on. What the Fleet Street journalists are interested in is scandals, splits, attacks, and rows—especially rows with the Frogs, Krauts, and Wops on the other side of the English Channel. While I was in London, the French government decided that it wouldn't let British beef into France, despite the fact that the European Commission had ruled it safe. Since forty-seven Britons have died from eating cattle infected by "mad-cow disease," and more than three thousand British cows contracted the ailment last year alone, the French action didn't seem entirely unreasonable; and, even if it was, the British government had the right to appeal to Brussels, a right it quickly invoked. Fleet Street, needless to say, saw things differently, especially when it emerged that some French farmers had been feeding their cattle human sewage. The *Daily Mail*, which the previous week had been offering its readers cheap tickets to Paris, launched a "Just Say *Non!*" campaign, urging all true patriots to boycott French goods, and the *Star* listed twenty-one reasons "Why *oui* hate 'em" (the French, that is). The *Sun*, a screaming tabloid that sells more than three and a half million copies a day, ordered Blair to "start kicking backsides in Paris and Brussels," and, when the Prime Minister failed to respond with sufficient vigor, took it upon itself to smuggle a British joint—of beef—through the Channel Tunnel and feed it to a "delighted" French family, then print an edition in French (front-page headline: "GUERRE") and hawk it on the streets of Paris. Within a few days, the European Union had ruled in the British government's favor, but Fleet Street's beef warriors weren't satisfied with Blair's performance, and neither was William Hague, the leader of the Conservative Party. "It is not just only the dead cows which have had their spines taken out," he declaimed in the Commons.

In this febrile environment, it is hardly surprising that the Blairites are obsessed with the media. Many of them were forced to look on helplessly as Fleet Street tortured two previous Labour leaders, Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock. The newspapers have been much friendlier to Blair, but the notion that most reporters are out to get the Labour Party remains a fundamental tenet of the Blair Project; and this paranoia is in no way attenuated by the fact that a good number of the people working in Downing Street are themselves former newspapermen. The terms of the relationship between No. 10 and the Westminster press corps were laid down immediately after the 1997 election by Alastair Campbell, Blair's official spokesman, an acid-tongued ex-political editor of the *Daily Mirror*. "O.K., you bastards," Campbell announced to the assembled hacks. "Explain to me just why I should waste my time with a load of wankers like you when you're not going to write anything I tell you anyway." Some of this animosity may be attributed to Campbell's rakish personality—a new biography reveals him to be a former boozer, brawler, and composer of soft pornography. (He may have done occasional gigolo duties, too, but the author, Peter Oborne, isn't totally clear on that point.) These days, however, Campbell is a sober and industrious man, and a sharp political strategist: his attitude toward reporters reflects more than personal venom. Access to Downing Street is carefully husbanded. Journalists who write favorable stories are rewarded with interviews and exclusives; members of the awkward squad get frozen out.

The Downing Street spin doctors don't confine their attentions to the monkeys in the press gallery; they also try to influence the organ grinders, and one organ grinder in particular: Rupert Murdoch, who owns the *Times*, the *Sunday Times*, the *Sun*, and *News of the World*, the Sunday paper with the biggest circulation. Murdoch's decision to swing the *Sun* behind Blair is widely regarded as one of the main reasons for New Labour's electoral success, and the question

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SKETCHBOOK BY EDWARD SOREL

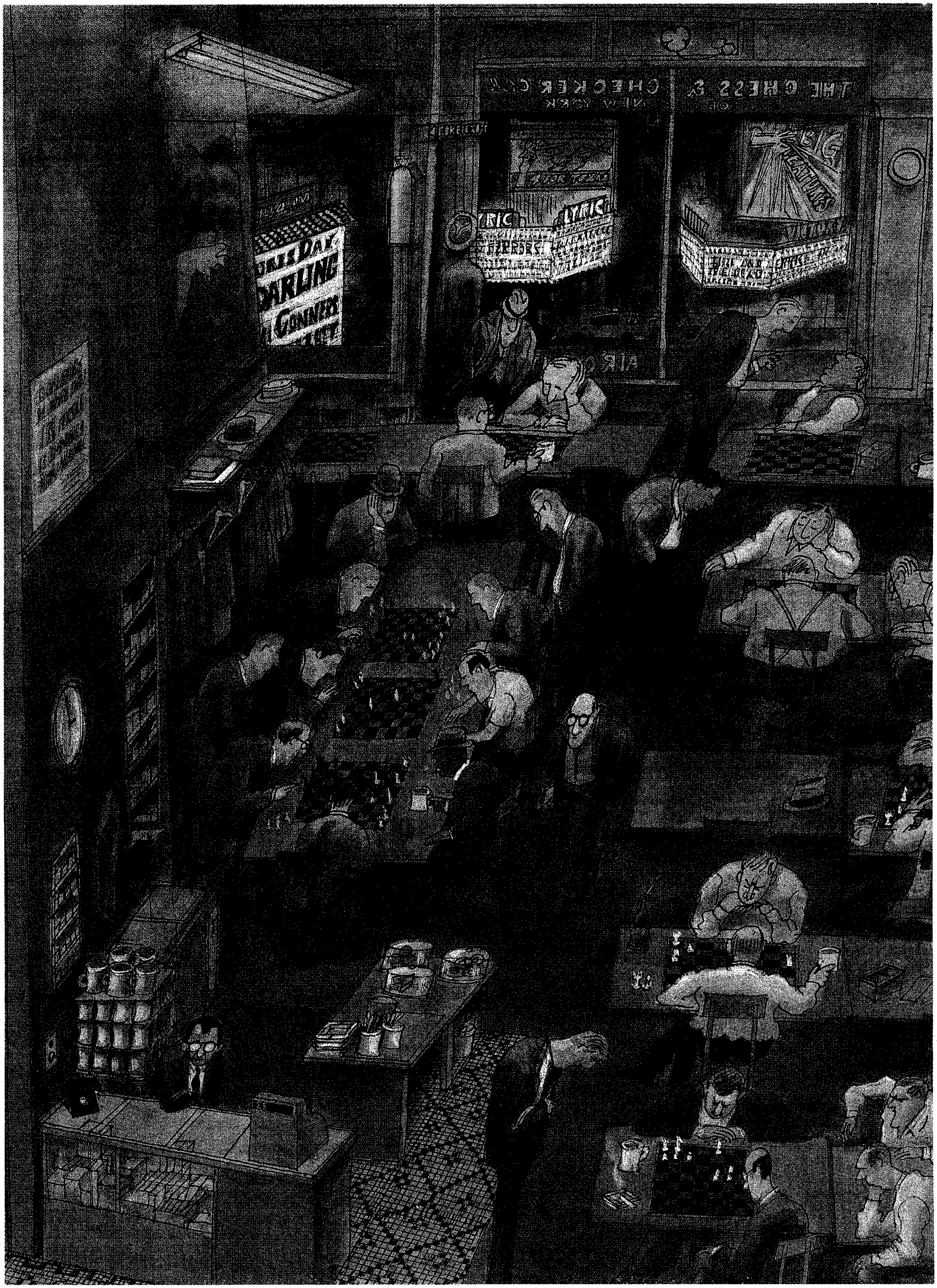
MISSING PIECES

I WAS never much of a chess player, but in the early fifties I used to hang around the Chess & Checker Club of New York. Occupying the second floor of a decrepit walk-up next to the New Amsterdam Theatre, on Forty-second Street, it was open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. At night, the neon of a dozen theatres made the street entrance easy to miss, but after 4 A.M., when the marquees went dark, the light from the club's large windows became a beacon, attracting the dispossessed as well as the chess possessed.

John Fursa owned the place. He was not amused when some of the regulars referred to it as "the flea house." In fact, John kept his establishment fairly neat. He regularly emptied ashtrays, collected abandoned coffee cups (china), and supplied plenty of hangers (wooden) for coats. There was no prohibition on betting and no embargo on bringing in food from Grant's, the all-night fifteen-cent-hamburger joint on the corner. Sometimes John would shatter the quiet with an explosion of expletives, signalling that another chess piece was missing. Someone, he said, was stealing them, one or two at a time, with the clear intention of accumulating a complete set. As far as I know, he never did catch the culprit.

Inept as a detective, John did better as a matchmaker, finding partners for patrons who showed up solo. Some nights, however, there was no one who played as poorly as I did, so I just stood around watching the masters. One of them was an intense young man with heavy-lidded eyes. Years later, I saw his photograph in *Sight & Sound*, above a caption identifying him as Stanley Kubrick, the director of "The Killing."

In time, Forty-second Street morphed into a gantlet of porno theatres and sex shops, and in the eighties the club closed its doors. Now, with the street Disneyfied, nothing as unprofitable as a forty-cent-an-hour chess parlor is likely to reappear. Pity. It was a good place to enjoy solitude without being alone. —E.S.


THE CHESS & CHECKER CLUB
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DARLING
GUNNERS
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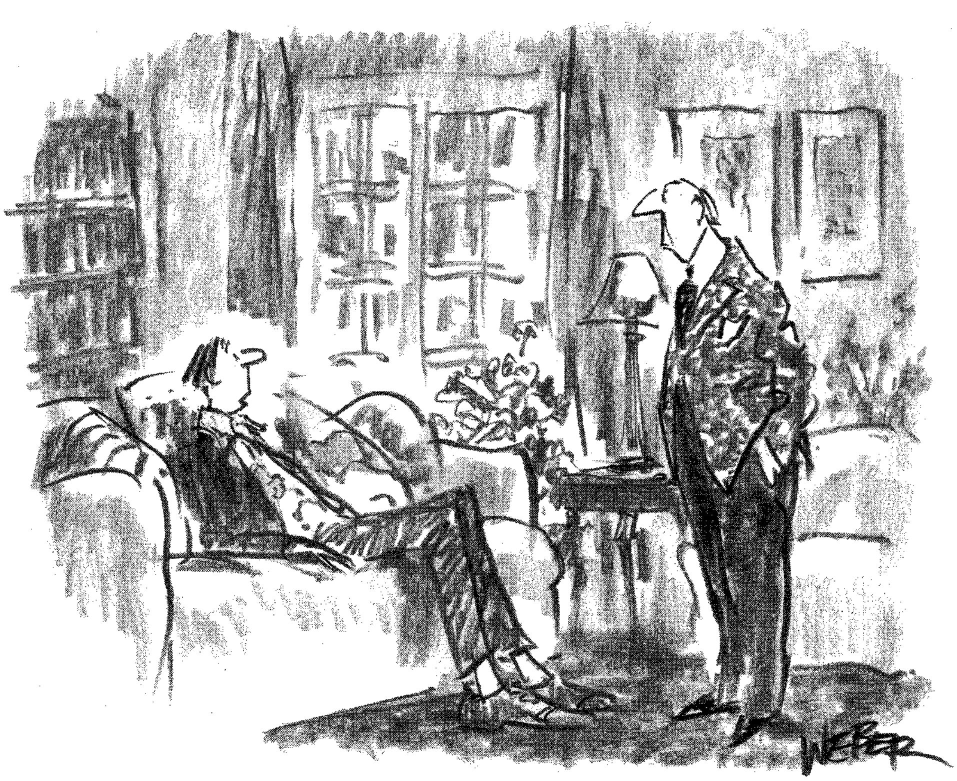


"It's not just me, Dad. Amazon.com has never made a cent, either."

of whether the tabloid will maintain its current editorial stance consumes many gray cells in Downing Street. A few weeks ago, the *Financial Times* reported that Murdoch had held a genial meeting with William Hague, the Conservative leader, who is spearheading the campaign against Britain's joining the European Monetary Union. Some Blairites sensed that the fickle press baron might be about to switch his affections once more, but for now, at least, that doesn't appear to be the case. "We agree with William Hague absolutely on the euro, but we doubt he is electable," David Yelland, the editor of the *Sun*, told me. "And we still agree with Blair more than we disagree with him."

THE leader of the Opposition is a balding Yorkshireman of just thirty-eight years, who was president of the Union at Oxford, where he also took a first in modern history, and who once worked for McKinsey & Company, the global management-consultancy firm. Clearly, Hague is not without brains, nor is he without political skills—witness his intervention in the beef wars. Nonetheless, Hague's experience during the two years after he took over from John Major, in July, 1997, was dismal. When the newspapers covered the Conservatives, which wasn't very often, they usually focussed on fresh splits in the Party, or on Hague's largely abortive attempts to shed his image as a youthful and ineffectual leader. (These efforts included wearing a baseball cap, modulating his Yorkshire accent so southerners would find it less off-putting, marrying a striking blonde, and hiring as his media adviser a former colleague of Alastair Campbell's on the *Daily Mirror*.)

"The basic problem facing William Hague was that the Conservative Party was in the grip of a severe identity crisis, and that persisted until the start of this year," Nicholas Wood, a former reporter for the *Times* who is now a spokesman for the Conservative leader, told me over lunch in the House of Commons. "Tony Blair essentially reassured Middle England that he was at heart a Conservative. On tax, crime, education, Europe, defense—all of these subjects—he used right-wing rhetoric. That really threw the Tory Party. It didn't have a clue how to attack Blair. He seemed to stand for everything it had stood for." Earlier this year, Wood continued, Hague finally settled on a viable political strategy. He would lambaste Blair as a "fraud": a politician who promised not to raise taxes and then oversaw an increase in the over-all tax burden; who told the *Sun* he loved the pound and then made plans to replace it with the euro; who promised to shorten the waiting lists for surgery in the National Health Service and then looked on as two hundred thousand people were added to the waiting lists to get onto the waiting lists; who promised to reduce crime and then freed dozens of I.R.A. murderers under the Northern Ireland peace agreement.

Hague has stuck to this line dutifully during the past few months. Wood claimed it is starting to pay off, but the evidence he cited wasn't exactly overwhelming. Exhibit No. 1 was a recent survey in the *Guardian*, which suggested that Blair's approval rating had fallen to fifty-two per cent from eighty per cent two years ago. This is a significant shift, and it reflects the increasingly vocal opposition to Blair's Project. But the Labour Party's enormous lead in the polls has hardly budged, and Hague's own ratings are still woeful. In the same *Guardian* survey, the most frequent descriptions of the Tory leader were "arrogant" and "extreme." Exhibit No. 2 in Wood's case was a recent television program in which Rory Bremner, a popular British comedian, presented Hague as a bumbling version of Superman. "For Rory Bremner to be satirizing William Hague as Superman, we think, represents quite a gain," Wood told me.

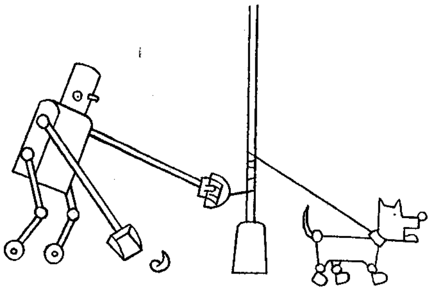
Blair isn't exactly quaking. His ultimate political aim, he explained to me, is to move beyond the class-based politics of the twentieth century and create, in New Labour, a broad, progressive alliance, similar to the one that dominated the Victorian era under the guise of the Liberal Party. The Liberal coalition included Whig aristocrats, businessmen, trade unionists, artisans, religious dissenters, and single-issue activists of many kinds. Under pressure from the rise of the working class and the Irish question, the coalition eventually split into three rival groups—Lloyd George's Liberals, the ancestors of today's Liberal Democrats; the Liberal Unionists, who were eventually absorbed into the Conservative Party; and the Labour Party—thereby facilitating seventy years of Tory electoral domination.

The Prime Minister's confidence in his own position was reflected by his decision this fall to recall Peter Mandelson, a controversial fellow-modernizer, to the Cabinet, as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Mandelson, who is often referred to within the Labour Party as the "Prince of Darkness," was forced to resign last Christmas from his previous post as Trade and Industry Secretary when it was revealed that he had borrowed about three hundred and seventy-three thousand pounds from a wealthy campaign contributor. It is an open secret at Westminster that relations between Mandelson and Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, are poisonous; and several people on Fleet Street told me that they thought Blair had made a serious error in recalling Mandelson so soon. When I put this to the Prime Minister, he said, "In government, whatever you do people say is a mistake." Mandelson, he added, is a "man of extraordinary ability" and the right person for the Belfast job, although "it's a very tough assignment" and "not a bed of roses for anyone, I can tell you."

Like John Major before him, Blair has devoted a lot of time and energy to the Irish question. The recent agreement between the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Fein on the decommissioning of weapons held by paramilitary groups was a big fillip to last year's Good Friday peace agreement, which combined a terrorist ceasefire with plans for power-sharing. In our talk, the Prime Minister seemed hopeful about the situation in Northern Ireland and coupled that optimism with a plea to American Nationalist sympathizers not to fund the breakaway Real I.R.A., which has rejected the peace agreement and carried out a series of attacks, including one last year in Omagh, where twenty-eight people were killed. "Anyone who has ever met the victims of Omagh—as I and Hillary Clinton and my wife did—will never forget the scenes of those people who had lost little children," he said to me, his voice cracking slightly. "I keep in touch with some of the victims who didn't die but suffered terrible injuries, and anybody who gives money to the Real I.R.A. is helping to maim or murder if these people manage to get going with their campaign."

IN the long term, the biggest challenge facing the Blair Project is to answer a question that doesn't really have an answer: What is modern? The Blairites often appear to suggest that "modern" is anything American. Many of the words they use ("benchmarking," "skilling," "transitioning"), the concepts they expound ("labor-market flexibility," "an enterprise society," "the knowledge-driven economy"), and the policies they promote (welfare reform, limited government, prison-building) are drawn from across the Atlantic. This infatuation is not accidental. A good number of the Blairites attended graduate school in America; and practically all of them believe that the United States, with its mobile labor force and vibrant high-technology sector, has discovered the formula for economic growth. That may be true—at the moment, it certainly seems so—but it presents something of a problem. If modernity is all things American, then Britain isn't really backward at all. American movies, American companies, American computers, American bankers, American health clubs, American bars, American fast food, American English—the country is overrun with things American. Even Wal-Mart and Ian Schrager have touched down in the British Isles—the latter bringing his trademark Philippe Starck décor, closet-size guest rooms, and toiletless men's rooms (urinals only) to a new hotel on St. Martin's Lane.

If, on the other hand, "modern" means forging an updated British identity, one distinct from American culture and American strategic interests, then there is no avoiding the potentially ruinous issue of Britain's future relations with its European neighbors. Until now, Blair has neatly sidestepped the question by saying that Britain's future lies in acting as a "bridge" between Europe and the United States. During our conversation, he repeated this phrase, and said that Britain could exploit her unique historical links with Europe, the United States, and the British Commonwealth in order to become a "pivotal power." It was "dangerous nonsense," he added, to suggest that Britain had to choose between its allies east and west. "We are stronger with the United States if we can also use our influence with Europe to bring the United States and Europe closer together—and we are stronger in Europe if we remain strong with the United States."



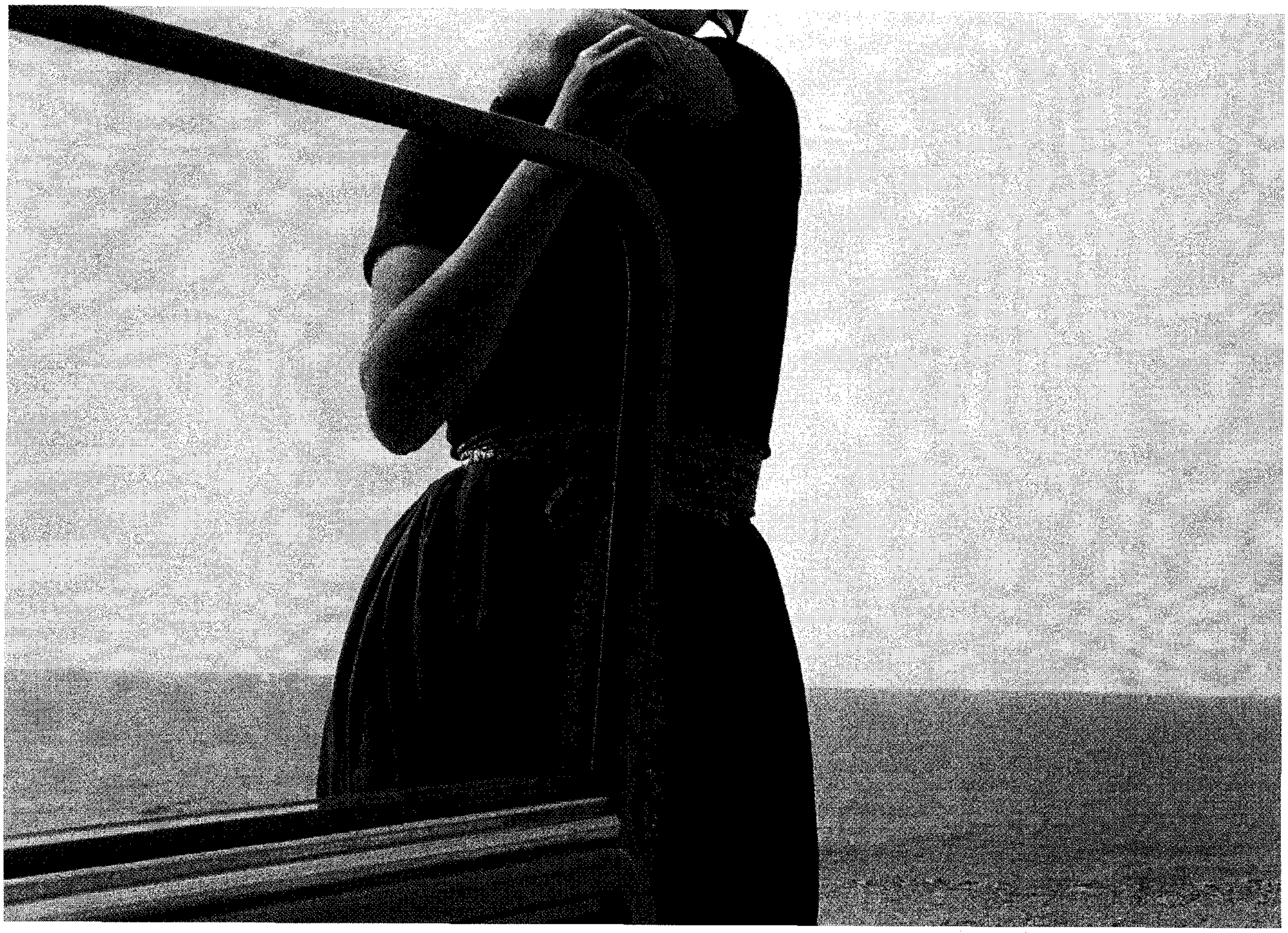
That may be the case now, but for how long? Britain's influence on the Continent is in fact diminishing, as a result of its failure to enter the first wave of European Monetary Union; and Blair has given little indication how he intends to resolve the matter. When I asked him about it, he reiterated his Government's current policy stance, which is that Britain in principle favors adopting the euro but will do so only when certain economic conditions are met, which is unlikely to be until after the next election. This is an evasion, as everybody involved—New Labour, the Conservatives, Rupert Murdoch—well knows. The other major European countries have every intention of pursuing their vision of an "ever closer" Union, and Britain will eventually have to decide whether to strap itself in for the duration of the ride or jump out the door. A Prime Minister who truly intended to put his stamp on British history would surely take that historic decision and try to bring his countrymen along with him.

Being a great Prime Minister involves taking political risks. When Winston Churchill warned during the nineteen-thirties about Hitler's imperial ambitions, he was widely written off as a warmonger. When the National Health Service was set up by Clement Attlee's Labour Government, it was portrayed as a Bolshevik innovation by the Conservative press. And when Mrs. Thatcher endured a deep recession (and, later, a miners' strike) in order to reduce inflation and break the unions' grip on the economy, she was the most unpopular Prime Minister of the post-war era. Reforming the House of Lords and allowing patients to book appointments on the Internet may be good and worthwhile policies (bringing lasting peace to Ireland would be more than worthwhile), but they won't define the course of British history for the next generation. Until Blair resolves the European issue, one way or the other, he cannot really claim to be a great Prime Minister—as opposed to a great politician, which he indubitably is. ♦

FICTION

MEETING IN AUGUST

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ



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SHE came back to the island on Friday, August 16th, on the two-o'clock ferry. She wore a plaid shirt, jeans, and simple flat shoes without stockings, she carried a sateen umbrella, and her only luggage was a beach bag. A line of taxis waited at the dock, and she went straight to an old-model car eaten away by the salt air. The driver greeted her like an old friend and took her on a jolting ride through a destitute village of mud-and-cane shacks, palm roofs, and white-sand roads that opened onto a burning sea. He had to swerve to avoid impassive pigs and the naked children who taunted them with bullfighter's passes. He left the village behind and drove along an avenue lined with royal palms, where tourist beaches and hotels lay between the open sea and an inland lagoon populated by blue herons. At last he stopped in front of the oldest, most dilapidated hotel.

The concierge was waiting for her with the keys to the only room on the second floor that faced the lagoon. She climbed the stairs in four strides and entered the shabby room with its strong odor of insecticide and an enormous bed that filled almost all the space. She took a kidskin toilet case out of the bag, and a book with uncut pages, which she laid on the night table, her place marked by an ivory paper knife. She took out a pink silk nightgown and put it under the pillow. She took out a silk scarf printed with tropical birds, a white short-sleeved shirt, and a pair of worn tennis shoes, and carried them and the toilet case into the bathroom.

Before tending to her appearance she took off the plaid shirt, her wedding ring, and the man's watch she wore on her right wrist and then splashed her face with water to wash off the dust of the journey and drive away the afternoon's fatigue. When she had dried herself she looked in the mirror and lifted her breasts, round and high even though she'd given birth to two children and was on the verge of old age. She pulled back her cheeks with the sides of her hands to see how she had looked when she was young. She passed over the first wrinkles on her throat—there was nothing she could do about them—and bared her perfect teeth, brushed with care after her lunch on the ferry. She applied deodorant to her clean-shaven underarms and put on the fresh cotton shirt with the initials AMB embroidered by hand on the pocket. She brushed the tangles out of her shoulder-length Indian hair and tied it in a ponytail with the bird scarf. Finally, she ran a tube of plain pomade over her lips, moistened her index fingers with her tongue and smoothed her eyebrows, put a touch of her pungent perfume behind each ear, and at last confronted the mirror with her face of an autumnal mother. Her skin, without a trace of makeup, still kept its original color, and her topaz eyes were ageless under their dark Portuguese lids. Her scrutiny of herself was thorough, her judgment merciless, and she found that she looked almost as good as she felt. Only when she put on her ring and watch did she realize she was late: it was already six minutes to five. But she allowed herself a nostalgic minute to contemplate the herons gliding motionless in the burning haze of the lagoon. The heavy black clouds told her it would be prudent to take the umbrella.

The taxi was waiting for her under the banana trees at the entrance. It drove down the palm-lined avenue until it reached a clear space between the hotels where there was an open-air market, and stopped at a flower stall. A large black woman taking her siesta on a beach chair woke with a start, recognized the woman in the back seat of the car, and laughed and chatted as she handed her the bouquet of gladiolus she had kept for her since morning. A few blocks farther on the taxi turned onto a narrow, almost impassable road that climbed along a precipice of sharp rocks. Through air rarefied by heat she could see the rows of yachts at the tourist marina, the departing ferry, the distant outline of the city rising from the mists of the horizon, the open Caribbean.

At the top of the hill was the sad cemetery of the poor. With no effort she pushed open the rusty gate and, holding her bouquet of flowers, began to walk along the path past graves swallowed up by weeds, past the debris of coffins and remnants of bones burned by the sun. The gravestones looked the same in the forsaken cemetery with a large-branched ceiba in the center. The sharp stones hurt despite her scorching rubber soles, and the harsh sun filtered through the sateen of the umbrella. An iguana emerged from the scrub, stopped short in front of her, looked at her for an instant, and escaped in a panic. She had already cleared three graves, and was exhausted and dripping with perspiration, when she recognized the yellowing marble stone with her mother's name and the date of her death, twenty-nine years before. She always gave her mother the news from home; she had told her confidential information so she could help her decide if she should marry, and a few days later she believed she had received her answer in a dream that seemed unequivocal and wise. Something similar had happened when her son had hovered for two weeks between life and death following a traffic accident, only this time the answer did not come to her in dreams but in a casual conversation with a woman who came up to her for no reason in a market. She was not superstitious but held the rational conviction that a perfect identification with her mother had continued after death. And so she asked the year's questions, placed the flowers on the grave, and left, certain she would receive the answers when least expected.

Mission accomplished: she had made the same trip for twenty-eight consecutive years every August 16th at the same time of day, in the same room of the same hotel, with the same taxi and the same flower-seller under the fiery sun of the same impoverished cemetery, in order to place a bouquet of fresh gladiolus on her mother's grave. And now she had nothing to do until nine the next morning, when the ferry would take her back.

Her name was Ana Magdalena Bach, she had celebrated her fifty-second birthday and the twenty-third anniversary of her harmonious marriage to a man who loved her and whom she had married without finishing her degree in literature, still a virgin who hadn't been engaged before. Her father was a music teacher and continued to direct the provincial conservatory at the age of eighty-two, and her mother had been a noted teacher at a Montessori primary school who, in spite of her accomplishments, never wanted to be anything else until she drew her final breath.

From her Ana Magdalena had inherited the elegance of her yellow eyes, the virtue of saying little, and the intelligence to hide her strength of character. Her mother had expressed a desire to be buried on the island, three days before her death. Ana Magdalena wanted to accompany her, beginning with that first trip, but no one thought it would be prudent because even she did not think she would survive her grief. On the first anniversary, however, her father took her to the island so they could place the marble stone still missing from the grave. She was terrified by the crossing, in a canoe with an outboard motor, which lasted almost four hours without a moment of calm sea. She marvelled at the beaches of powdery golden sand at the very edge of the virgin jungle, the thunderous clamor of the birds, the ghostly flight of herons over the still water of the inland lagoon. She was depressed by the stark poverty of the village, where they had to sleep outdoors in hammocks strung between coconut palms, and by the large number of black fishermen whose arms had been mutilated by the premature explosion of dynamite charges. But when she saw the splendor of the world from the height of the cemetery she understood her mother's wish. That was when she made it her duty to bring her mother a bouquet of flowers every year for the rest of her life.

August was the hottest month of the year and the season of heavy downpours, but this was a private obligation that she was bound to keep, and always alone. It was the only condition she imposed on her husband before they married, and he knew enough to realize it was something beyond his control.

And so, year after year, Ana Magdalena had seen the growth of the glass canyons of the tourist hotels, had

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passed from Indian canoes to motor launches, and from these to the ferry, and believed she had reason to consider herself the oldest native in the village.

THAT afternoon, when she returned to the hotel, she lay down on the bed wearing only her lace panties and resumed reading the book she had begun on the trip. It was Bram Stoker's original "Dracula." She had always been a good reader. She had read with rigorous care the things she liked best, which were short novels of any type, such as "Lazarillo de Tormes," "The Old Man and the Sea," "The Stranger." In recent years, as she was approaching fifty, she had immersed herself in novels of the supernatural.

"Dracula" had fascinated her from the start, but that afternoon she succumbed to the continuing thunder of the ceiling fan and fell asleep with the book on her chest. She woke two hours later in the dark, dripping with sweat, in a bad mood, and faint with hunger.

This was not an exception to her routine over the years. The hotel bar stayed open until ten, and on occasion she had gone down for something to eat before she went to sleep. She noticed that there were more patrons than usual at that hour, and she did not think the waiter was the same one as before. To avoid mistakes she ordered a ham and cheese sandwich on toast, and *café con leche*. As she waited she realized she was surrounded by older patrons, like herself, who had come here in the days when this was the only hotel, or who had limited funds. A young mulatta girl was singing popular boleros, and Augustín Romero himself, old and blind by now, tenderly accompanied her on the same baby grand that had been at the opening celebration.

She finished quickly, overwhelmed by the humiliation of eating alone, but she found the music appealing, and the girl knew how to sing. When she noticed her surroundings again, only three couples remained, sitting at scattered tables, and a different man—she hadn't seen him come in—sat facing her. He was wearing white linen, as they did in her father's day, and he had metallic hair and a musketeer's mustache with pointed ends. A bottle of aguardiente and a half-filled glass were on his table, and he seemed to be alone in the world.

The piano began Debussy's "Clair de Lune" in a nice bolero arrangement, and the mulatta girl sang it with love. Ana Magdalena was moved, and she ordered a gin with ice and soda, the only alcohol she sometimes allowed herself and that really agreed with her. She had learned to enjoy it when she was alone with her husband, a cheerful social drinker who treated her with the courtesy and complicity of a secret lover.

The world changed with her first sip. She felt fine, playful, happy, capable of anything, a woman made beautiful by the sacred mixture of music and alcohol. She thought the man at the table facing hers hadn't looked at her, but when she looked at him a second time after her first swallow of gin, she caught him looking at her. He blushed. But she did not avert her eyes while he took out his pocket watch, put it away with impatience, looked toward the door, poured himself another glass, confused because he knew she was looking at him without mercy. Then he looked straight at her. She smiled without reserve, and he greeted her with a slight bow of the head. Then she stood, went to his table, and attacked with a man's weapon.

"Can I buy you a drink?"

The man crumbled.

"It would be an honor," he said.

"I'd be satisfied if it were a pleasure," she said.

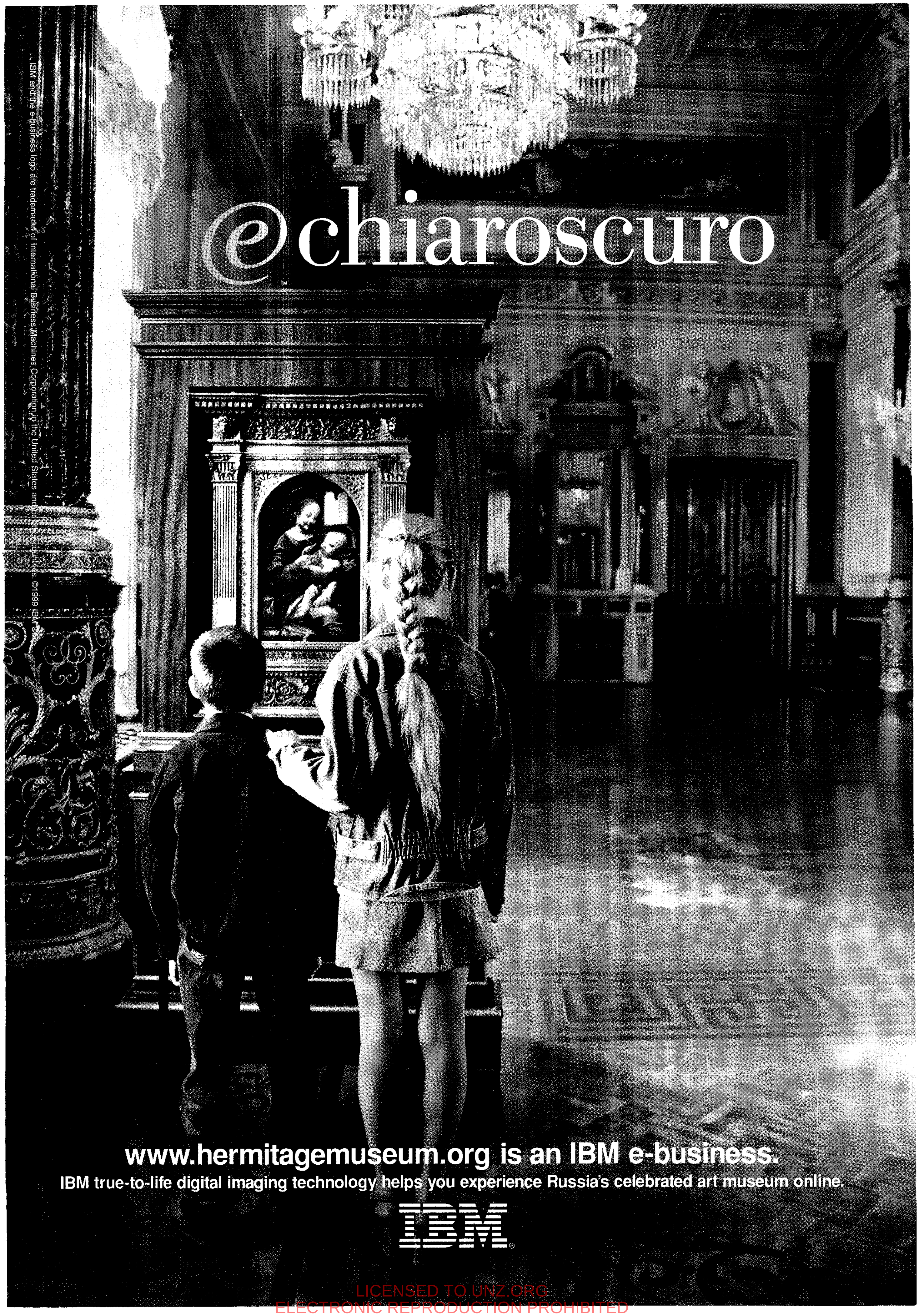
Before she finished speaking she was sitting at the table, and she poured a drink for him and another for herself. She did it with so much skill and style that he couldn't take the bottle so she wouldn't have to pour her own drink. Cheers, she said. He followed her lead, and they both emptied their glasses in one swallow. He choked, coughs racked his entire body, and he was bathed in tears. He took out an irreproachable handkerchief that gave off a faint whiff of lavender water and looked at her with streaming eyes. They remained silent for a long while until he had dried his eyes with the handkerchief and recovered his voice.

She dared to enter the field with a question: "Are you sure nobody's coming?"

"No," he said without any logic. "It was a business appointment, but nobody's coming now."

With an expression of calculated disbelief, she asked, Business?

That's all I'm good for these days. He replied like a man so she wouldn't believe him. And she, with a vulgarity that



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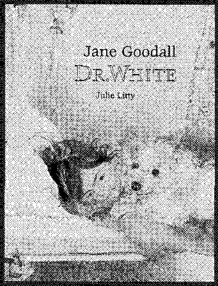

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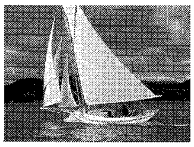

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was not natural but done with care, finished him off: "That must be at home."

She continued to shepherd him with a light touch. She played at guessing his age and erred by one year too many: forty-six. She played at discovering his native country from his accent but was wrong three times. She tried to guess his profession, he hurried to say he was a civil engineer, and she suspected it was a trick to keep her from finding out the truth.

They talked about the audacity of turning a sacred piece by Debussy into a bolero, but he hadn't noticed. No doubt he realized she knew about music while he hadn't gone beyond "The Blue Danube." She said she was reading "Dracula." He had read it as a boy, but only in a children's version, and was still struck by the idea that the Count had disembarked in England transformed into a wolf. With the second drink she felt as if the aguardiente had collided with the gin somewhere in her heart, and she had to concentrate to keep her head clear. The music ended at eleven, and in the bar they were only waiting for them to leave to close up.

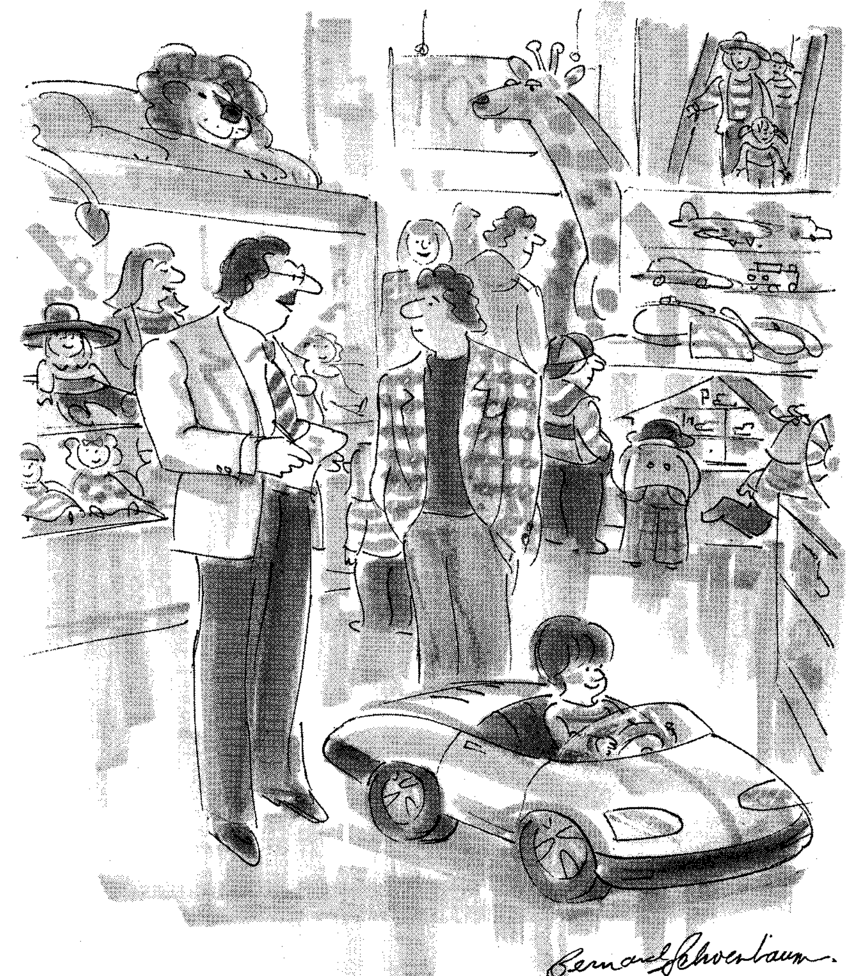
By then she knew him as if she had always lived with him. She knew he was fastidious, impeccable in his dress, and had mute hands made worse by the colorless polish on his nails. She knew he felt constrained by her large yellow eyes, which she did not take off his, and she knew he was a good man and a coward. She felt she had the mastery to take the step she never would have dreamed of taking in her life, and she took it without mysteries: "Shall we go up?"

He said with ambiguous humility, "I'm not staying here."

But she didn't even wait for him to finish. She stood and shook her head a little to control the alcohol, and her radiant eyes flashed.

"I'll go up first while you pay," she said. "Second floor, room 203, to the right of the stairs. Don't knock, just come in."

She went to her room impelled by a sweet anxiety she hadn't felt since her last night as a virgin. She turned on the ceiling fan, but not the light; she un-



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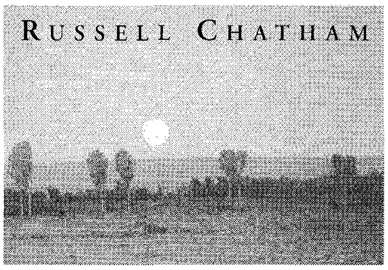

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dressed in the dark, without stopping, and left a wake of clothes on the floor from the door to the bathroom. When she turned on the bathroom light she had to close her eyes and force herself to inhale deeply to calm her breathing and control the trembling of her hands. She washed in a rush: her sex, her underarms, her toes crushed by the rubber-soled shoes, for despite her terrible sweating that afternoon she hadn't planned to bathe until she went to bed. Without time to brush her teeth, she dabbed some toothpaste on her tongue and went back out into the room, which was barely illuminated by the oblique light from the bathroom.

She didn't wait for her guest to push on the door but opened it from the inside when she heard him coming. He was startled: Good Lord! But she gave him no time to spare in the dark. She pulled off his jacket with forceful hands, she pulled off his tie, his shirt, and tossed everything over his shoulder to the floor. As she was doing this, the air became saturated with a heavy scent of lavender water. He tried to help her at first, but she stopped him with her boldness and authority. When she had him naked to the waist, she sat him on the bed and kneeled down to take off his shoes and socks. At the same time he unfastened his belt buckle so that all she had to do was tug on his trousers to remove them, neither one caring about the shower of keys and the handful of bills and coins that fell to the floor. And then she helped him pull his shorts down along his legs, and she realized he was not as well endowed as her husband, the only man she had known, but he was untroubled and erect.

She allowed him no initiative. She straddled him and took him in all the way to her soul and devoured him for herself, not thinking about him, until they were both exhausted in a sweaty broth. She remained on top, struggling alone with her first pangs of conscience beneath the hot stream of air and oppressive noise of the fan, until she realized he was having trouble breathing, his arms outstretched under the weight of her body. Then she dismounted and lay on her back beside him. He remained motionless until he could catch his breath and ask, "Why me?"

"You looked like a real man," she said.

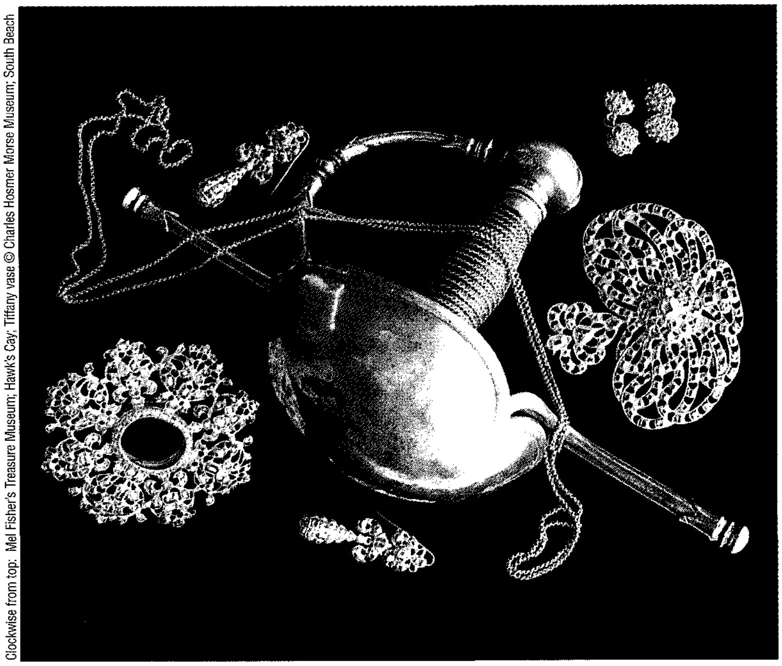
"Coming from a woman like you, that's an honor."

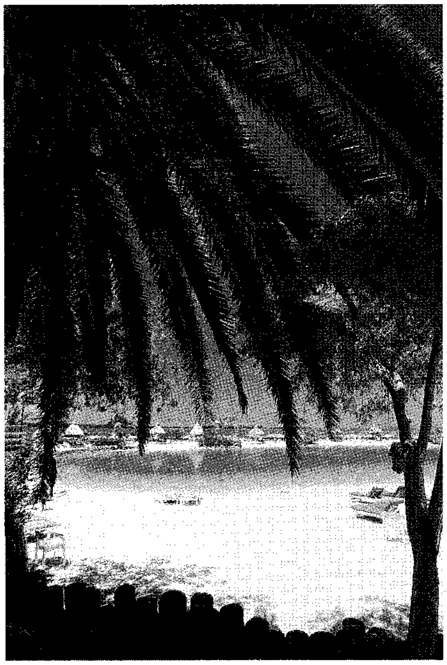
"Ah," she joked, "wasn't it a pleasure?"

He did not reply and they both lay listening to the sounds of the night. The room was soothing in the dim light of the lagoon. They heard wings beating nearby. He asked, What's that? She told him about the nocturnal habits of herons. After a long hour of whispered banalities she began a slow exploration with her fingers from his chest to his lower belly. She used her feet to explore his legs and discovered that his entire body was covered with soft curly hair that reminded her of grass in April. Then she began to arouse him with kisses on his ears and neck, and for the first time they kissed on the mouth. This was when he showed himself to be an exquisite lover who carried her, without haste, to the heights of excitement. She was surprised that such inexpressive hands were capable of so much tenderness. But when he tried to shift her into the conventional missionary position she resisted, fearful that the miracle of the first time would be ruined. But he was firm and imposed his will, he moved her as he liked and in his own way, and he made her happy.

It was after two when she was awakened by a clap of thunder that shook the foundations of the building, and the wind forced open the latch on the window. She hurried to close it, and in the instantaneous daylight of another flash of lightning she saw the choppy water in the lagoon, and the blue herons feebly beating their wings in the squall.

On her way back to bed her feet became tangled in their clothes. She left hers on the floor to pick up later, and hung his jacket on the chair; over that she hung his shirt and tie, she folded his trousers with care so as not to wrinkle the crease, and on top she placed the keys, pocketknife, and money that had fallen out of his pockets. The air in the room was cooling in the storm, and she put on her pink nightgown made of a silk so pure it gave her gooseflesh. The man, sleeping on his side with his legs drawn up, looked to her like an enormous orphan, and she could not resist a rush of compassion. She lay down behind him and put her arms around his waist, and the ammoniac smell of his body soaked in perspiration touched her soul. He took a sharp breath and began to snore. She dozed off and woke in the void of the electric fan when the power





Clockwise from top: Mel Fisher's Treasure Museum; Hawk's Cay; Tiffany vase © Charles Hosmer Morse Museum; South Beach

FLORIDA
BEYOND THE SUN

Ponce de León may not have discovered the fountain of youth more than three-hundred years ago, but Florida nevertheless springs forth with a wealth of cultural and historical attractions all its own.

by Ralph DiGennaro

VISIT FLORIDA

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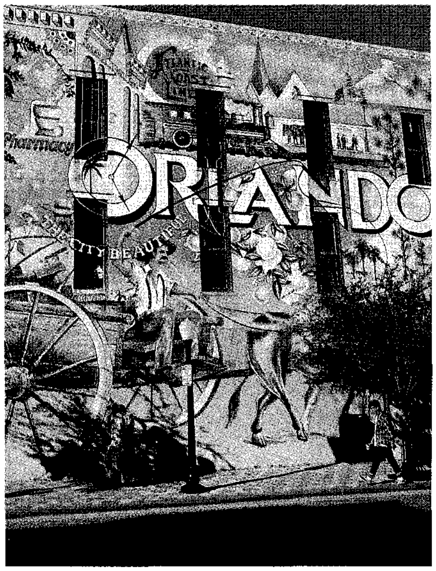
While the sunshine state basks in the glory of sandy beaches, pristine waters, and glorious year-round weather, sun worshippers can just as easily slip into the guise of art aficionados, history buffs, and theatre patrons. A state that boasts the oldest city in America—St. Augustine, founded in 1565—enjoys a rich legacy, from the centuries-old Spanish influenced architecture of its magnificent hotels and mansions to the marvelous Art Deco designs that define Miami's trendy South Beach.

Indeed, the famed square-mile Art Deco District of South Beach, known as SoBe, is an architectural treasure of more than eight-hundred buildings restored in recent years in the Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and Spanish Mediterranean Revival styles. For an in-depth history lesson along with wonderful cultural anecdotes of the region, join a ninety-minute guided walking tour sponsored by the Miami Design Preservation League, a group credited with the renovation and refurbishing of the district.



CULTURE QUEST

The state's past comes alive on canvases, sculpture, and in the stunning selection of antiquities and artifacts on display in the many galleries, museums, historic landmarks, parks, and environmental preserves.

Beyond the fireworks and neon glow of **Orlando's Disney World**, Epcot Center, and MGM Studios are a myriad of cultural sites that should not be missed. Many of these unique historical and artistic attractions can be easily accessed thanks to CultureQuest, a shuttle service to the area's top cultural venues such as the **Orlando Museum of Art**, the **Orlando Science Center**, and the **Harry P. Leu Gardens**, to name a few. Just outside Orlando are a handful of charming small towns with plenty of personality of their own. Winter Park is home to the **Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art**, where the world's most comprehensive collection of Tiffany glass is on display.

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COASTAL DIVERSITY

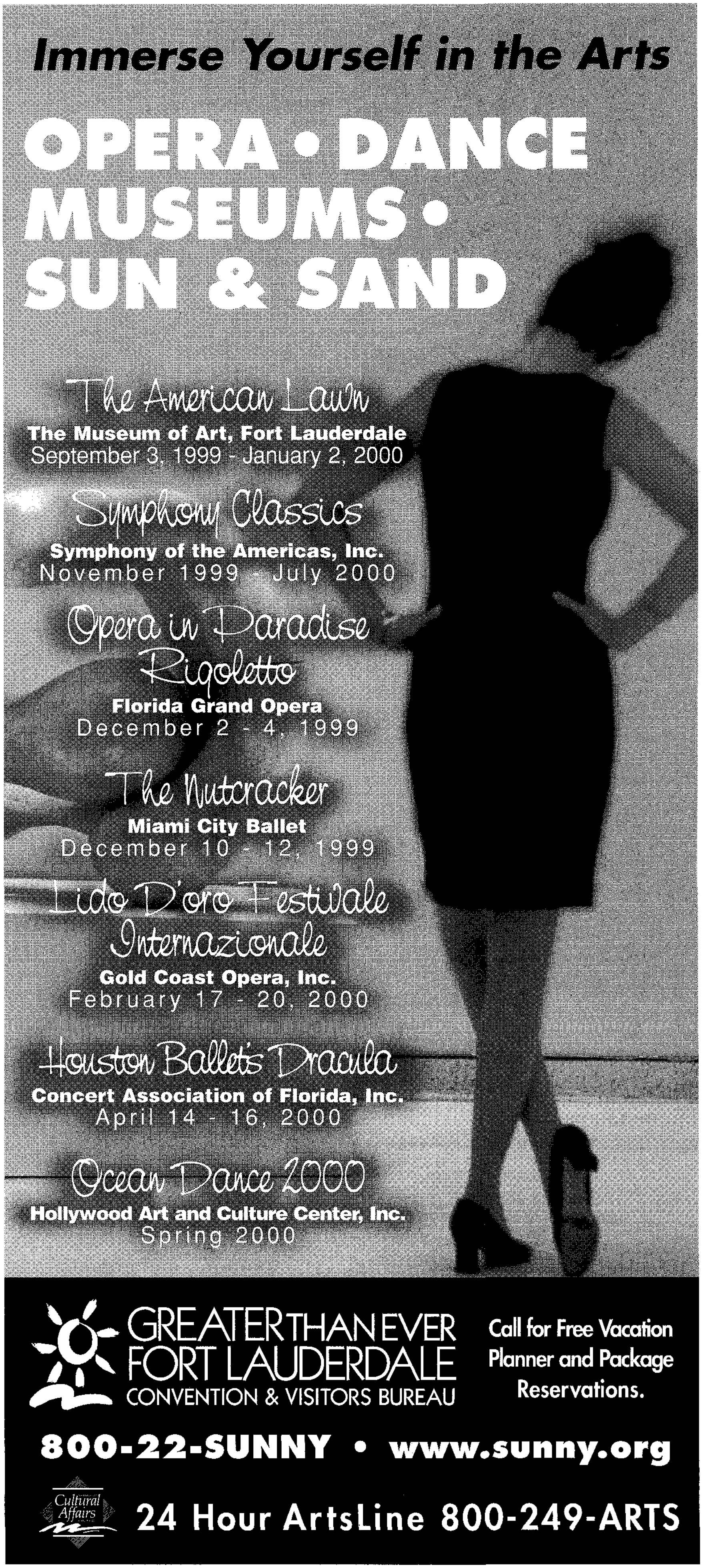
From Fort Lauderdale to Daytona

A fan of abstract expressionism? Next March, the **Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale** is presenting a comprehensive exhibit of the work of celebrated artist Willem de Koonig, the Dutch-born American abstract expressionist. Proving that Greater Fort Lauderdale is more than an oceanfront playground, the museum will host "Four Generations of Pissarro," an exclusive exhibit of works by Camille Pissarro and three generations of his descendents in January.

While soaring space shuttles garner much of the Central East Florida spotlight, there are a multitude of historical gems awaiting discovery, if one is willing to venture slightly off the beaten path. Almost within an earshot of the roar of race car engines, Daytona Beach's downtown historic district boasts a variety of precious cultural finds, nestled along the banks of the scenic Halifax River. Housed in an old bank building, for example, is the **Halifax Historical Museum**, where Indian and Spanish artifacts found on nearby plantations are on exhibit, along with newspapers dating back to 1883 and memorabilia from the early days of beach automobile racing.

GOLDEN GALLEONS

Comprising St. Lucie and Martin counties, as well as Indian River, Florida's Treasure Coast is aptly named for the Spanish galleons that lie sunken offshore. Ironically, the misfortune of local merchants once robbed by pirates now yields dazzling exhibits for modern-day travelers to enjoy. At **Mel Fisher's Treasure Museum** in



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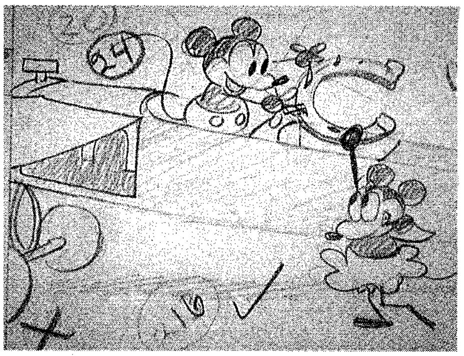
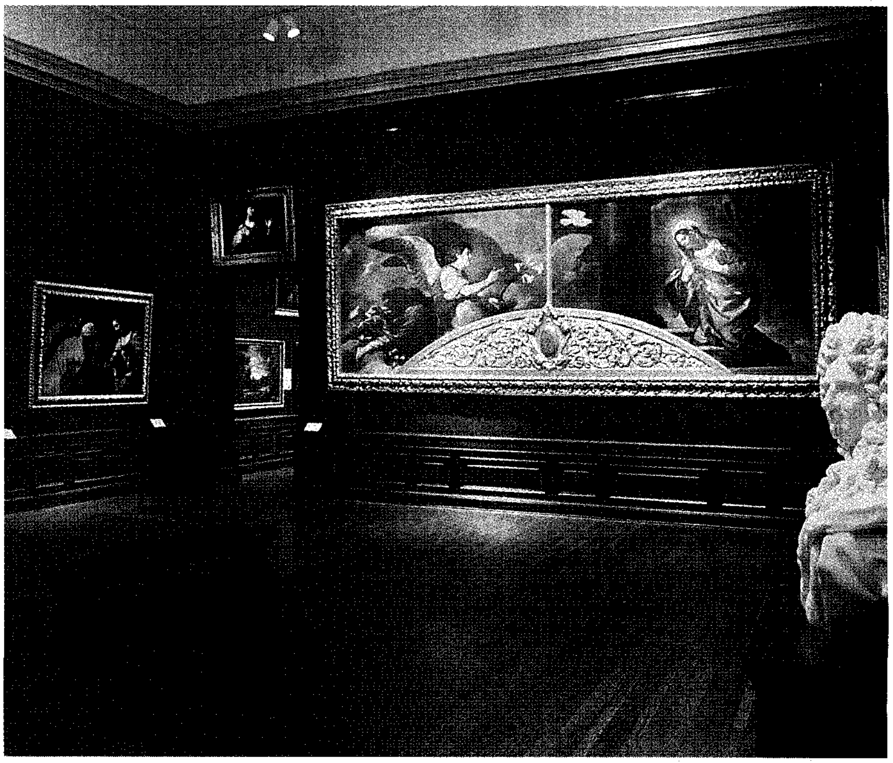
For a respite from cultural overload, visit **Guana River State Park**, south of Ponte Vedra Beach, which offers scenic mountain biking along nine miles of old service roads and boat rides on nearby rivers.

EDEN OF THE SOUTH

Shoppers can enjoy Ponte Vedra's impressive collection of resort boutiques, galleries, and stylish clothiers. It is also home to the PGA and ATP Tours, and sports some of Florida's most well-groomed and challenging golf courses. Gainesville is home to the University of Florida Gators, one of the top college football teams in the nation. But the town,





known locally as the "Eden of the South" also has bragging rights to the **Harn Museum of Art**. Located on the University of Florida campus, the museum showcases dynamic African, Asian, and American art, and features an innovative film series, which alone is worth the trip.

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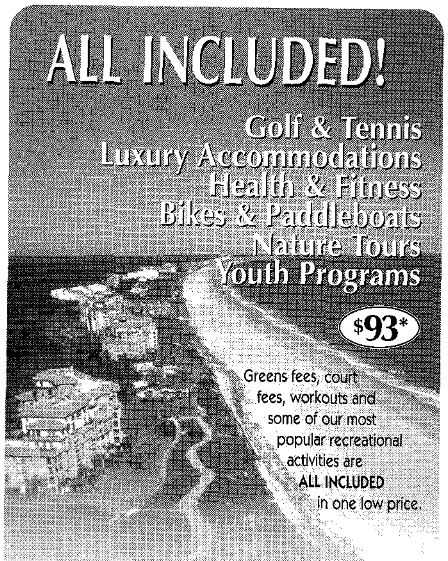
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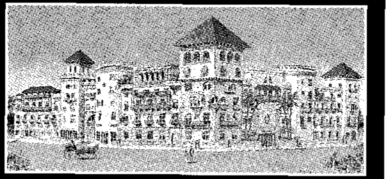
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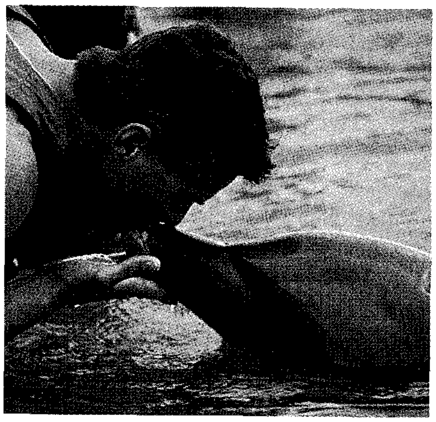
THE WONDERS OF THE KEYS

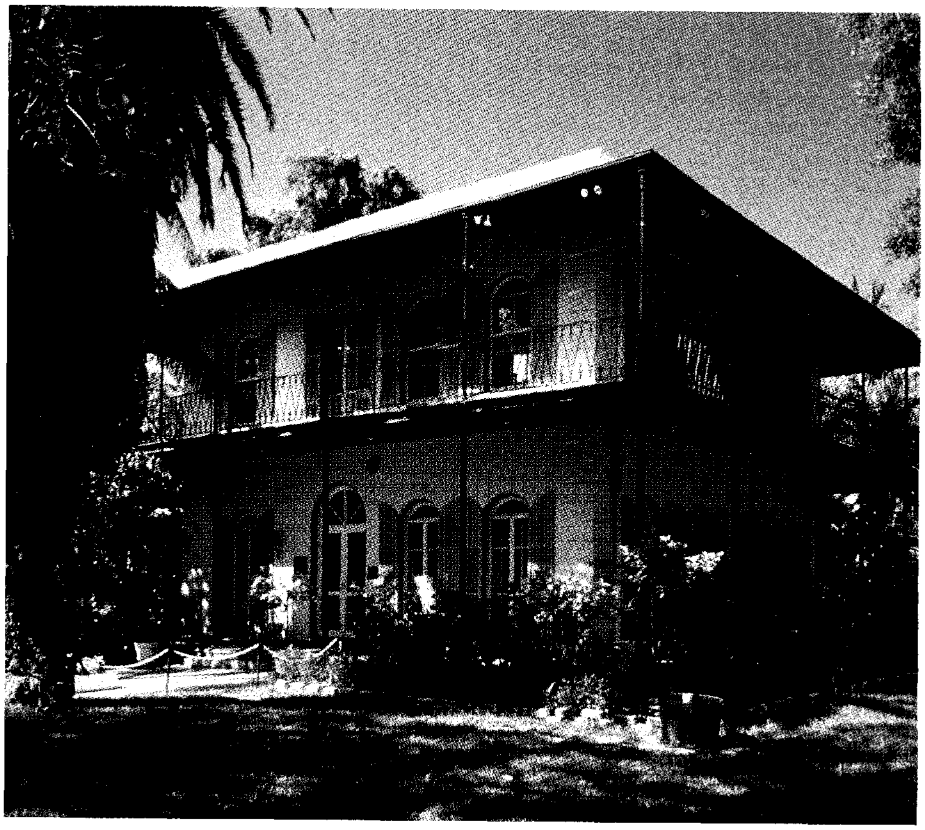
A Literary Landscape

Perhaps the sunshine state's most heavily visited territory, The Florida Keys—an awe-inspiring extension of Florida's coastline stretching from Homestead in the north to Key West at the southernmost tip—is steeped in art, culture, and lore. From an historical perspective, the Florida Keys can be quite surprising. Marathon Key, for example, in the heart of the Florida Keys, is home to **Crane Point Hammock**. Once the site of an Indian village, the area abounds with evidence of pre-Colombian and prehistoric Bahamian artifacts.

If Crane Point Hammock whets your appetite, explore this and other historical landmarks at its **Museum of Natural History**. The adjacent children's museum is the first of its kind in the Keys. However, the whole family should visit the Keys' most renowned historical site, the **Hemingway House** in nearby Key West, where America's favorite literary "original," Ernest Hemingway, lived and worked for ten years. Now that's the stuff of legend.

(Ralph DiGennaro is a New York freelance writer who covers fashion trends and frequently pens articles on travel and culture for national general interest magazines.)





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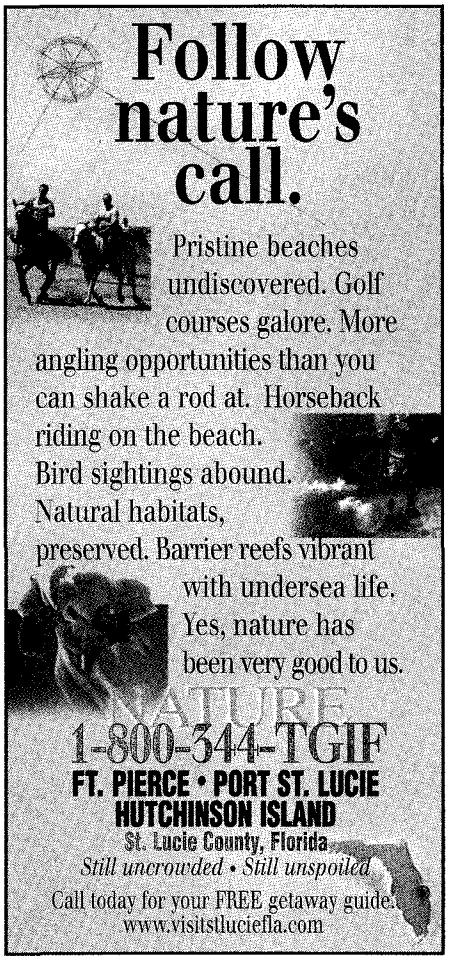
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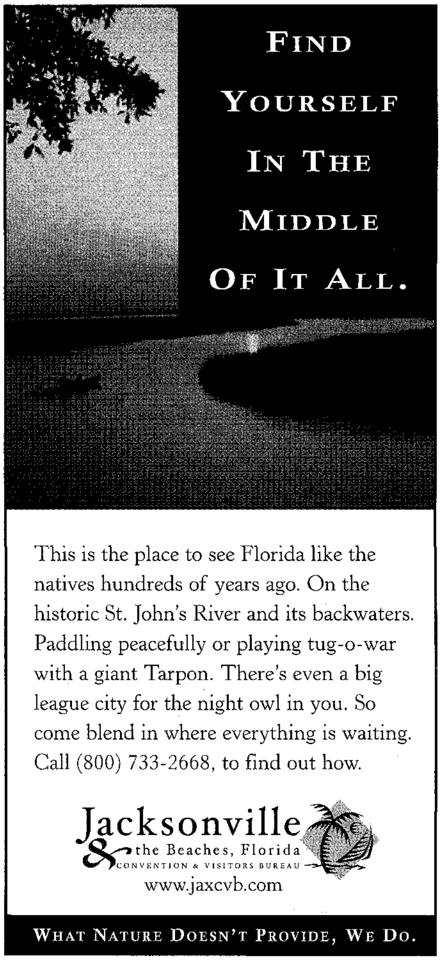
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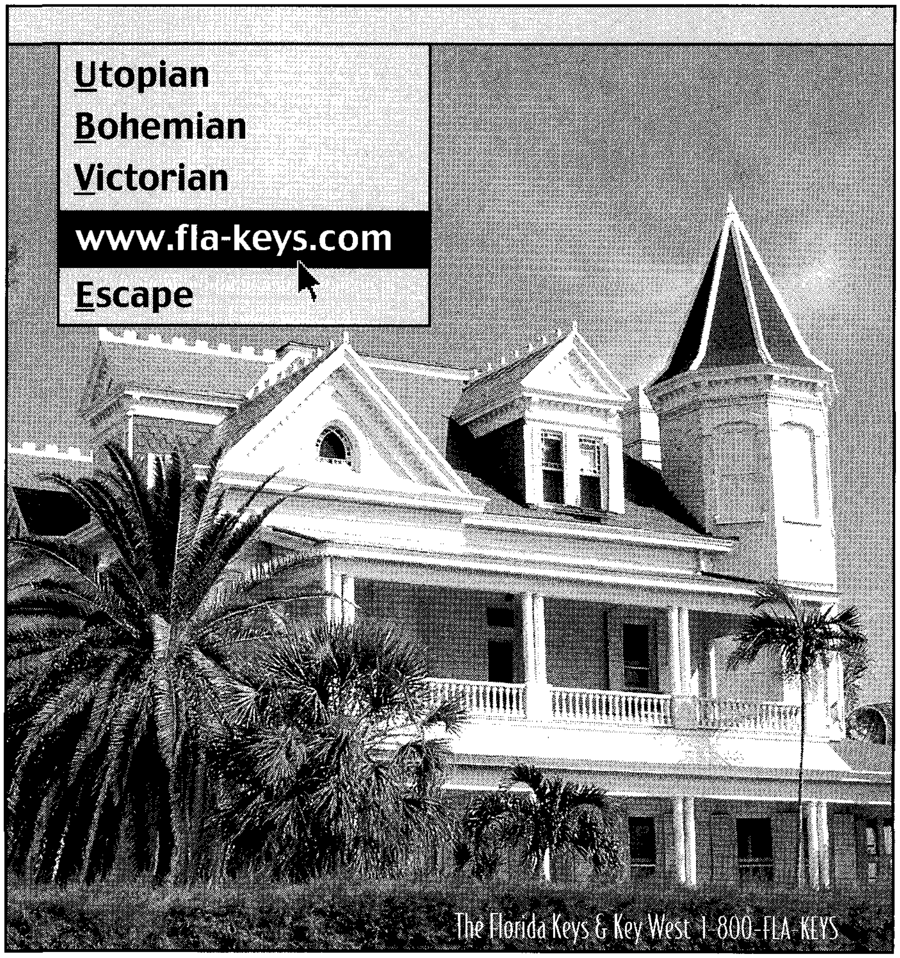
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had gone and the room was bathed in the green phosphorescence of the lagoon. He was snoring now with a continual whistle. She began to tap her fingers on his back out of sheer mischief. He gave a start and stopped snoring, and his exhausted member began to revive. She left him alone for a moment to pull off her nightgown. But when she turned back to him her wiles were useless, and she realized he was pretending to be asleep to avoid the prospect of a third time. She moved to the other side of the bed, put on her nightgown again, and fell into a deep sleep with her back to the world.

Her internal clock woke her at daybreak. For a moment she lay drifting with her eyes closed, not daring to admit the throb of pain in her temples or the taste of copper in her mouth because of her uneasy feeling that something unknown was waiting for her in real life. From the sound of the fan she knew the power had returned and the room was visible in the dawn over the lagoon.

Without warning, like the lightning bolt of death, she was struck by the brutal awareness that for the first time in her life she had fornicated and slept with a man who wasn't hers. Shaken, she turned to look at him over her shoulder, and he wasn't there. And he wasn't in the bathroom. She turned on the lights and saw that his clothes weren't there but hers, which she had left on the floor, were folded and placed, almost with love, on the chair. Until then she hadn't realized that she knew nothing about him, not even his name, and all that remained of her night of madness was a faint lavender scent in the air that had been purified by the storm. Only when she picked up the book on the night table to put it in her bag did she realize that in its horror-filled pages he had left a twenty-dollar bill. ♦

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Edith Grossman.*)

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

[*From the Northampton* (*Mass.*) *Daily Hampshire Gazette*]

Michael Harriman, who gave police an address in Russell, was arrested Friday at 7:23 p.m. on North Pleasant Street in front of the Blue Moon Café and charged with being disorderly after he refused to stop yelling obscenities at people passing by, police said. It was his 40th birthday.

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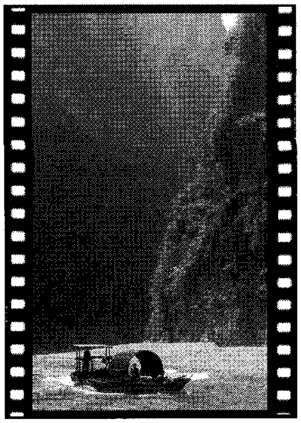

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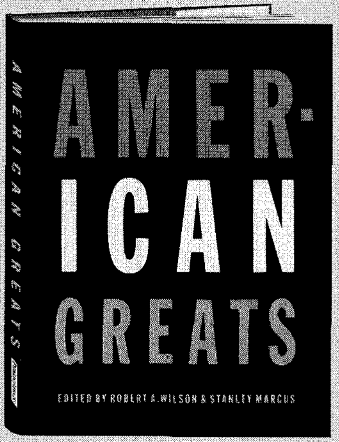

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NIGHT AND DAY

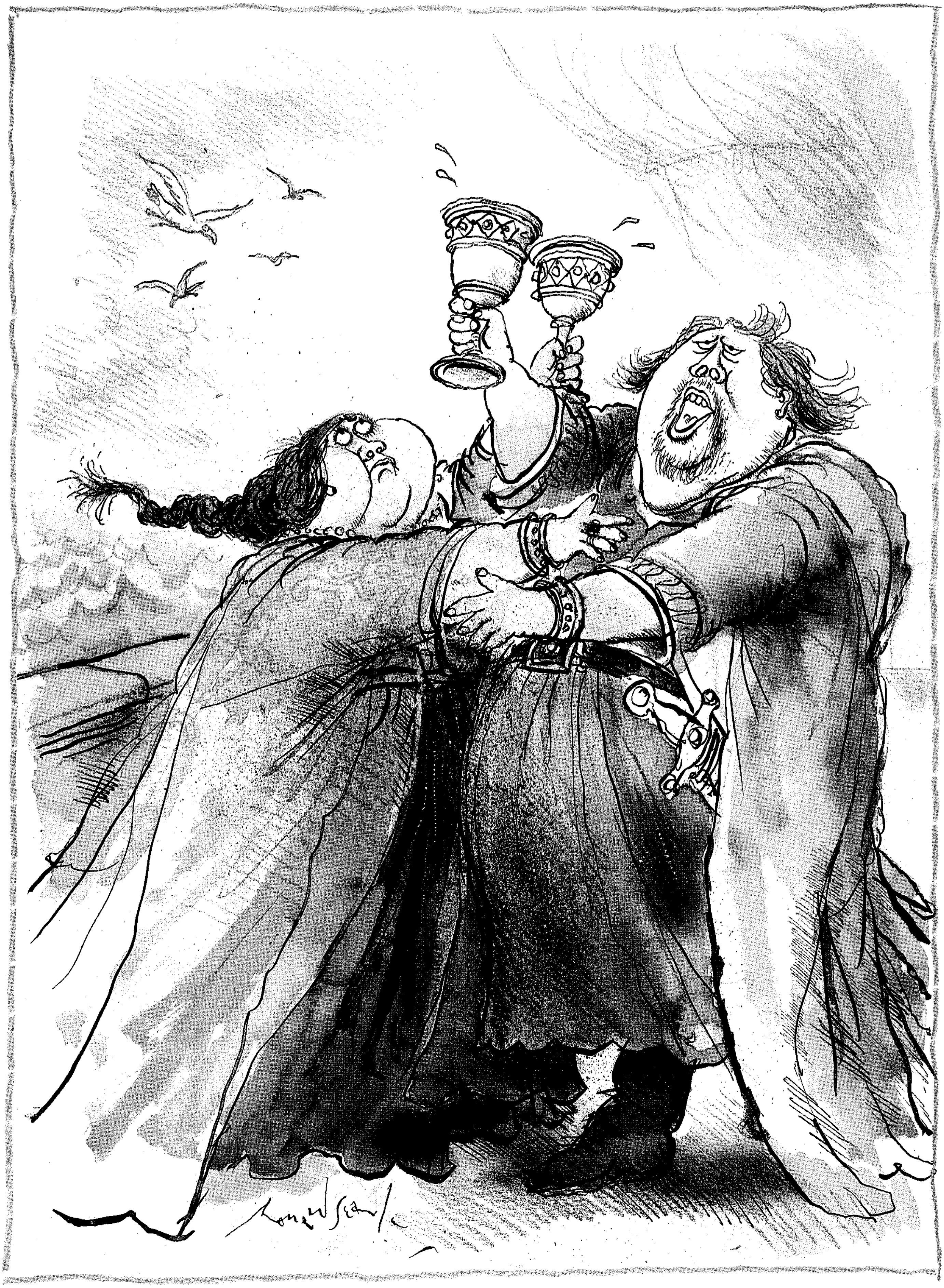
"Tristan" is the one.

BY ALEX ROSS

MONDAY, November 22nd. A thin mist settles over Manhattan. Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde" arrives at the Metropolitan Opera for the first time in sixteen years. Wagnerites, who have been counting the days to this "Tristan," are ravenous. At the two intermissions, and afterward in the midnight fog, you can hear opinions swirling: Does Dieter Dorn's stylish, Prada-toned production serve the Master well? Is Ben Heppner up to the murderously difficult male lead? Is Jane Eaglen, for all her vocal splendor, too steely, too immobile, in her embodiment of Isolde? Others, less certain of themselves, recycle the tautologies that have been bouncing off this work for more than a century. Tristan" is, well, "Tristan"; there is nothing like it. And, in truth, there isn't. "Tristan" dwarfs and warps the ordinary world to which you are eventually forced to return. The opera is gigantic and, at the same time, uncomfortably intimate, almost intrusive. It plays on every emotion in the human repertory—from elation to terror, from shame to release. If someone asks you what you think, you may be tempted to say, as if about a poorly understood episode in your own life, "I don't want to talk about it."

Look closer, and you realize that "Tristan" makes a project of destroying you. The musical language, with its slithering chromaticism and free-floating chords, has narcotic effects to which people in the latter half of the nineteenth century became notoriously addicted. The struggles of the singers to make themselves heard over the orchestra are, cruelly, part of the opera's power, enacting the struggles of individual hopes against collective reality. Wagner's libretto, the apex of a checkered literary career, draws not only on the Tristan legend but also on a handful of Shakespeare plays. "Romeo and Juliet" is there, with its smoldering ecstasies and rivalries. "The Tempest" is cited in Isolde's opening outburst, as she summons her arts of sorcery in an effort to sink the ship on which she and her apparent nemesis Tristan are travelling together. (She does not, of course, succeed: unlike Shakespeare's Prospero, who sets the story in motion with his spells, Isolde is trying to stop the opera prematurely, and Wagner won't let her.) "Hamlet" is present in the opera's uncertainties and ambiguities, its layer upon layer of self-consciousness, its endless talk of words and silence and music and listening.

Of the various worlds of meaning which "Tristan" contains, the Met's new production seems most at home in the self-referential one, in which the opera is a drama of, for, and about music itself. At the outset, James Levine indicated a very slow tempo, and the cellos held the sustained F of their opening phrase for a small eternity. The winds clung to the chord that followed—the famous "Tristan" chord, which points in no particular direction. The whole be-



Jane Eaglen and Ben Heppner: Two star-crossed lovers who are lost in mutual bliss.

ginning is a question, not a statement, and it invites you to lean in and listen more intently, in the hope of learning the answer. (Not all of the audience took the bait, as rude bouts of coughing demonstrated throughout.) Levine is a conductor with an extraordinary feeling for harmony, and under his guidance the orchestra kept giving new colors to the “Tristan” chord, whether in its early, questing form or in the grim transposition of Act III. That said, Levine’s tempos on opening night verged on inertia, and the opera never fully took flight.

Dorn’s production was a spare, handsome affair, with fluid lighting by Max Keller and semi-abstract sets by Jürgen Rose. The ship of Act I was reduced, in the style of Wieland Wagner’s postwar Bayreuth productions, to a monumental sail and mast. King Marke’s castle became a black chimney with doors that opened on a spooky yellow closet. Tristan returned home to a dreamscape of chivalric toys. Costumes and stage movement had a slight Kabuki flavor—Robert Wilson lite. The stage several times emptied out altogether, leaving a geometry of perspective lines. The design shifted attention away from the singers’ bodies and toward their voices—a good thing, in general, considering the cumbersome physiques of the two leading singers.

The hypnotic simplicity of this “Tristan” was at its most potent in the endless love duet of Act II. Eaglen and Heppner were silhouetted against a deep-blue background, their voices displacing their bodies altogether. As reality dissolved into an incorporeal intertwining of musical lines, the lovers were incapable of obeying, or even of hearing, Brangäne’s cry of “Beware!” By Wagnerian design, we in the audience didn’t get the message, either: Brangäne’s warning, with its tones held over many beats, with its chords floating like lanterns in fog, blended all too smoothly with the whole. This, remarkably, is the sound of people not listening: the music is too strong for the meaning to be grasped. And so the entrance of Melot, Tristan’s killer, cuts into our ears like the thrust of a knife.

There is, however, more to “Tristan” than ritual trance. Eaglen and Heppner supplied consistently beautiful tone, but they fell short as vehicles of violent

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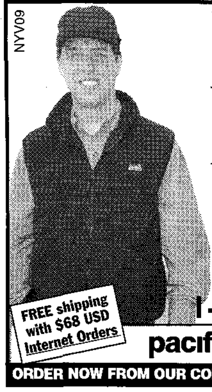

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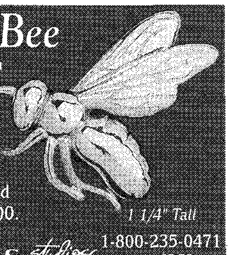

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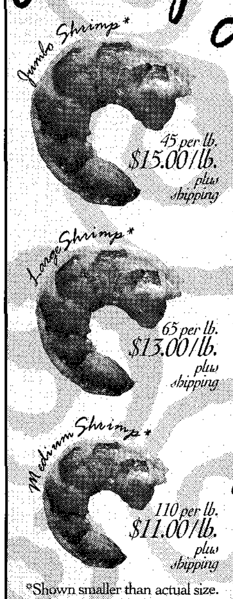
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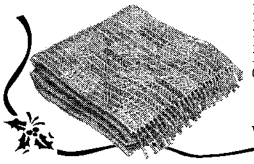

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emotion. Eaglen, certainly, is a wonder; she sang the most difficult stretches of the role with awesome ease, sounding nervous only at the very beginning of the opera and again in reaching her two scary high C's early in Act II. And she had no trouble moving from a commanding dramatic voice to a melting lyrical one, as when she sang the pivotal line, "He looked me in the eyes." But prettiness isn't enough—that moment should also be charged with uncertainty and wounded pride. Heppner, whose dynamic range is not as broad, had more of a struggle, and at times his mezza voce sounded dry and distant. He seemed intent on keeping the music going rather than on throwing himself into the role. His Act III monologues gave only flashes of a Jon Vickers-like delirium. It's a gift, of course, to have a tenor who can cope as well with the part as Heppner does—unlike some famous predecessors, he sang every note. But he is a long way from putting a personal stamp on Tristan. He was not helped by the knavish-seeming, rough-voiced Kurwenal of Richard Paul Fink.

Everything that was missing in this "Tristan" became apparent with the stunning entrance of René Pape, as King Marke. Pape, possibly a bass for the ages, filled the house with a huge, golden tone and nailed down the text line by line. Emotion could be read in his voice and on his face. You knew even before he sang that his character had suffered a tremendous blow. For "Tristan" is much more than a tale of two people lost in mutual bliss: with an emotional honesty that these days would be considered outlandish, Wagner shows us the wreckage in their wake. Happiness between two people, he has the temerity to point out, may bring misery to others. There is also Brangäne, whose devotion to Isolde leads to a final sadness that Wagner leaves largely to the imagination. Katarina Dalayman, in a notable Met début, sang the role with keen dramatic focus and a wary edge. Dorn, in an intriguing revision of the final tableau, has Isolde end the "Liebestod" with her arms outstretched, as if she were prepared to sing on and on; Brangäne and Marke, meanwhile, move dejectedly to either side of the stage, still telling the dire truth that no one wants to hear. ♦

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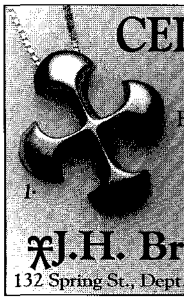

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An idiosyncratic list of some of our favorite Web sites.

Balducci's (balducci.com). You've got to eat, so you might as well eat like a New Yorker. This food museum in Greenwich Village delivers everything you need for your kitchen—buckwheat blini for that order of beluga, a sack of superfino arborio rice from the Po Valley, a twenty-two-pound Parma prosciutto (that'll be two hundred and seventy dollars, please). Those who don't know their way around the stove can order a New England lobster dinner for six (complete with littlenecks, mussels, corn on the cob, and baby red-skinned potatoes). The front page of the site is updated daily, with a new recipe (parmesan polenta, sun-dried-tomato tapenade) and a special entrée; fanatics can sign up for an E-mail newsletter. If you've moved out of town and are homesick for the comestibles or the customers, Webcams (balducci.com/webcams.asp) let you pay a vicarious visit. Be careful, though: you might see that special someone with someone other than you—at least, if her idea of a hot date is a trip to the cheese counter.

Media Gossip (mediagossip.com). Where media mavens begin the day. Culling business news, humor, and gossip from a wide variety of sources, the indefatigable creator of the site, Jim Romenesko, serves fresh dish daily, along with links to all the important media columnists, publications, and television and radio shows. You can click to all the usual suspects (the Washington *Post's* Howard Kurtz, *Brill's Content*, the New York *Observer's* "Off the Record"), but Media Gossip also brings the scandal and the skinny in from the hinterlands, the "flyover" states, and the alternative press. Media people check it the way Henny Youngman once read the obituaries: to see if their number is up.

Arts & Letters Daily (cybereditions.com/aldaily). A more refined cousin of Media Gossip, this New Zealand site links to news wires, magazines, and journals, focussing on articles of cultural concern. It's updated six days a week, with alluring lead-ins for new selections popping up at the top of three densely packed columns: Articles of Note, New Books, and Essays and Opinions. The editor, Denis Dutton, likes a bit of slap and tickle as much as the next bloke (a piece on Robert Graves's mistresses, or muses, as he liked to call them, had pride of place a few weeks ago), and he keeps the tone humorous ("A colleague was stunned but relieved when an economist revealed he was changing his sex: 'I thought for a moment you were converting to socialism'"), but A&L junkies really come to feast on the belles-lettres buzz: articles on T. S. Eliot's dwindling reputation, Harold Pinter's innumerable peeves, Albert Camus's lost manuscript.

Virtually Vancouver (virtuallyvancouver.com). One of the latest and best of the many virtual city tours. (You'll need QuickTime Player, but it takes only a few minutes to download.) Click on the map of Vancouver, B.C., to zoom in on a precise area and, using your cursor, "walk" the streets. If a spot seems interesting, simply stop, click and drag the image, and pan slowly to take in a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view. It's the perfect complement to a Vancouver guidebook. In the future, there'll be no such thing as a bad vacation.

FashionUK (widemedia.com/fashionuk). One of the best fashion sites around—cheeky, entertaining, quick to download, and authoritatively hip. Besides offering the expected designer profiles, trend reports, events calendar, dressing do's and don'ts, and an extensive library of fashion links, the site's reporters examine the clothing world's goings on with a skeptical eye. A recent story on United Aliens, a group of anti-fashion art students and activists who are hawking a collection of Y2K Protective Couture ("diaphanous light advanced fabrics . . . endowed with . . . qualities to shield from depleting energies"), was followed by an interactive poll asking readers "Whadya reckon?" and allowing them to click on "Cack" or "Cool."

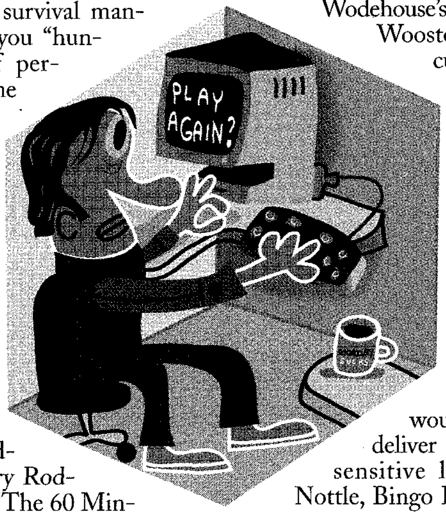
Money.net (money.net). Stock information is one of the few things (along with sex and sports) that people are willing to pay to look at, but Money.net is free. While there's always gratis info at Yahoo et al. (instant stock quotes and related news), this site has a "real-time portfolio tracker" that you can customize. It's useful for those with lots of stocks to track, but also more fun to look at than a tank full of razor fish.

The Virtual Flyshop (flyshop.com). The on-line counterpart to *Fly Fisherman* magazine. It's an exhaustively deep, rich site with good graphics and pretty photography, consistently high-quality auctions, daily river reports, lots of instruction (on etiquette, still-water trout tactics, how to fish steamers), on-line shopping, links to expedition outfitters, classifieds ("Trade my DT4F line for your WF3F?"), and lovingly designed recipes for flies. The Fly Tiers Bench features an ongoing monthly contest. (The October winner was a "black-and-orange steelhead fly with a 'pumpkin butt.'")

The Oubliette (nemoria.dropbear.id.au/oubliette). In a medium filled with sites devoted to things you already know too much about, this collection of works by overlooked and obscure authors conjures an age definitely pre-Internet—or several ages, rather. Here you will find sections devoted to the twelfth-century Japanese poet Lady Daibu, the twentieth-century English glass-engraver and poet Laurence Whistler, and James Elroy Flecker, a turn-of-the-century English poet "often grouped with the Decadents." "Who?" you might ask. Precisely the point. "Originally, an oubliette was a secret dungeon, where you put people and then forgot about them," says Kirsten Bishop, who runs the site from Australia. "I think of my oubliette as being something like the crack at the back of the literary world's sofa."

A Web of On-Line Dictionaries (facstaff.bucknell.edu/rbeard/diction.html). The place to search for any word in almost any language: Albanian, Guarani, Coptic, Urdu—even Rasta and Pennsylvania Dutch. You'll also find links to specialized English dictionaries elucidating the nomenclature of disciplines as diverse as Advertising and Metallurgy. And if you've been looking for a Hebrew-English basketball dictionary you're in luck.

World Net Daily (worldnetdaily.com). From the far right wing of the Web, a clearing house of articles, essays, and conspiracy theories about liberal media bias. Subtitled "A Free Press for a Free People," the site has plenty of Y2K info, including a link to a "must have" video survival manual that will save you "hundreds of hours of personal research." Some recent articles include "Now Showing: Your DNA," about the lack of protection for genetic fingerprints, and a report on how gun deaths have plummeted since 1993. Books for sale at the site's store include "Hell to Pay: The Unfolding Story of Hillary Rodham Clinton" and "The 60 Minutes Deception," about the "shocking web of deceit" that holds the television news magazine together.

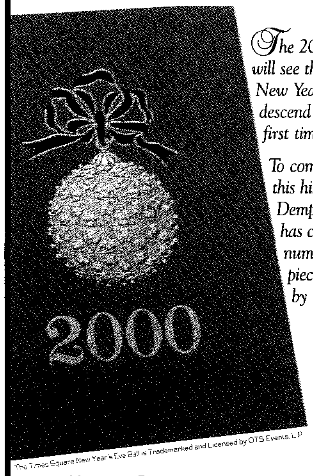


Planet Mars (seds.org/~spider/mars/mars.html). For couch astronauts who can't get enough of the angry red planet, a large collection of Hubble Space Telescope pictures of Mars from different angles and during different seasons. (Check out the series of the Pathfinder landing site during a canyon dust storm.) All Mars, all the time.

McSweeney's Internet Happy Giver (mcsweeneys.net). Rather than an online version of the delicious, but infrequent, literary "quarterly" *McSweeney's*, this site has been conceived as a kind of booster shot of short humorous squibs and satiric jeux d'esprit—"Notes on Revising Last Night's Dream," "Reviews of Stories and Anecdotes Recently Related to Me." McSweeney's alchemy produces hilarity from the most unpromising material; the regular feature "Most Censored Press Releases of 1999 (Thus Far)," for instance, wreaks cruel revenge on the publicists of the world, reproducing verbatim the most banal press releases to have come through the fax machine.

Africana.com (africana.com). A portal to the cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora, this site bills itself as "The Black Lane on the Information Highway." It mixes sober and authoritative educational content, news, and on-line discussions of important books in African studies. It also features historical material on subjects from ancient African kingdoms to hip-hop, and biographies of such leading lights in black history as W. E. B. Du Bois and Clayton (Peg Leg) Bates, the one-legged tap-dance star. Live Webcasts are available by more than eighty radio stations from as far afield as Egypt, Benin, Guadeloupe, and Morocco.

The P. G. Wodehouse Appreciation Page (smart.net/~tak/wodehouse.html). Like the Drones Club, where P. G. Wodehouse's befuddled hero Bertie Wooster repairs to toss biscuits with his friends and escape the company of women—especially aunts—this lovingly obsessive site is a gathering place for kindred souls. Aside from logging on for the seemingly endless links to all things Plum, fans come to take the interactive Quizlet (Q: Whom would you ask to hand-deliver a critical and highly sensitive letter: Gussie Fink-Nottle, Bingo Little, Dahlia Travers, or Bertie Wooster?), to tell their favorite Jeeves or Blandings saga, or to recall how they got to know the author ("Years ago I fell madly in love with a young woman who would NOT shut up about Wodehouse. I read his work assiduously; I never said thank you"). Though renown of Bertie's butler, Jeeves, has spread even to those unfamiliar with the canon, only a few can quote Wodehouse at will. Hence the pleasure of the "random quotation" feature, which generates such gems as "Why don't you get a haircut? You look like a chrysanthemum."—Sean Elder



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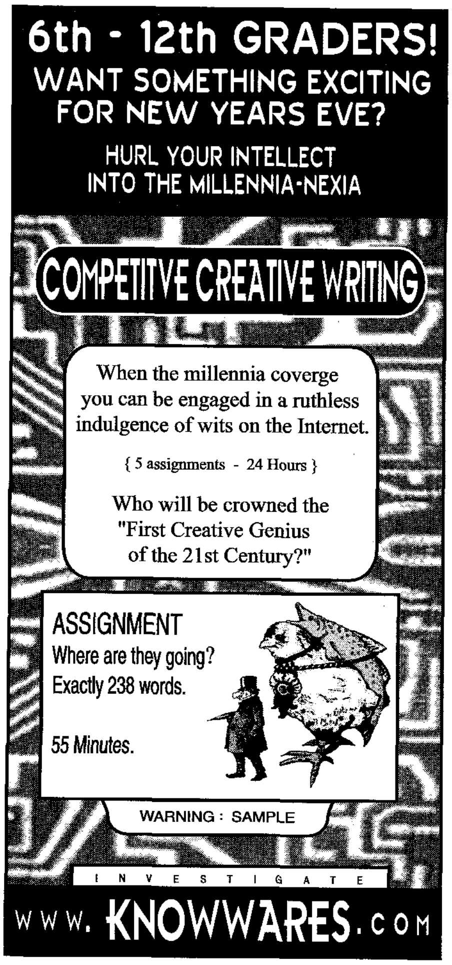
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BOOKS

AMERICAN PIE

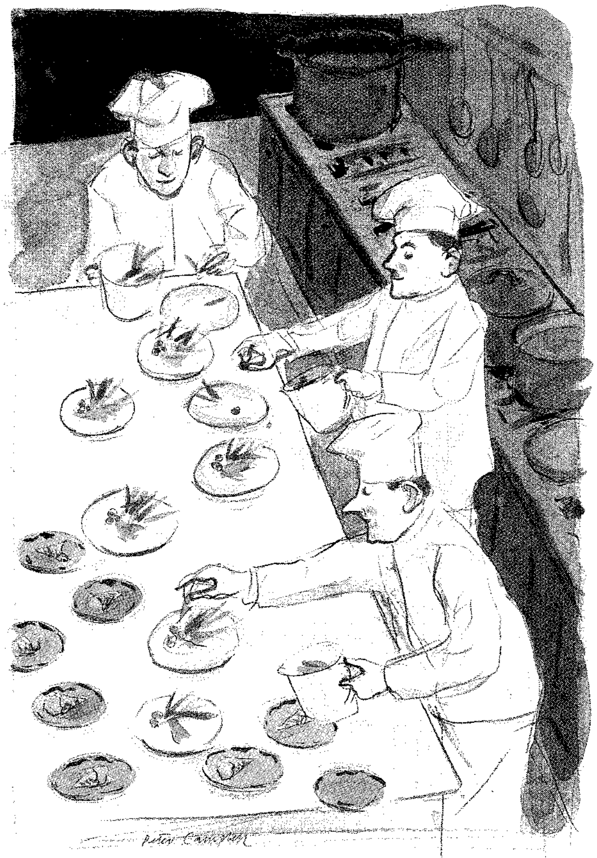
The culinary canon, from ketchup to cuisine moralisée.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

> I stand on the edge of a vermilion pool, a saturated virgin pickle whose frothy shores resemble pink rock candy. Five years ago, this was saltwater in the San Francisco Bay; today it is a soupy scarlet brine—colored by the algae that bloom red at the specific salinity of this pond—the last stage before it becomes salt.

THESE sentences, taken from Michele Anna Jordan's new cookbook, "Salt & Pepper" (Broadway; $25), are offered for the use of any future historian trying to describe the lengths to which America's gastronomic revolution, born in the sixties, had progressed by the late nineties. What Jordan is talking about is the new artisan salt farming. Its premier product—called *fleur de sel* by the French, who first cultivated it—is not the kind of sea salt marketed under brand names such as La Baleine. That salt is produced in the regular way, by the evaporation of sea water. This new stuff is harvested from crystals blooming on the surface of special saline pools. And, whereas La Baleine costs about two dollars a pound—I do not speak of ordinary table salt, artificially evaporated in ugly old factories, and selling at forty-nine cents a pound (Jordan lists its uses as "household cleanser; cooking emergencies")—*fleur de sel* will set you back a bit more. At Dean & Deluca, the variety produced by M. Gilles Hervy, *artisan paludier*, or marsh artisan, of Guérande, in Brittany, costs twenty dollars a pound, which is only a little less than what they're getting for smoked salmon a few aisles over.

Like most trends that have been around for a while, the gastronomic revolution has exhausted its novelty in the center and is consequently expanding at the top and bottom. Last year, about a thousand cookbooks were published in the United States, and there have been roughly as many every year throughout the nineties. At the low end, we have the celebrity offerings: recipe collections by George Foreman, Linda McCartney, Jane Fonda, Sophia Loren, Patti LaBelle, and Sarah, the Duchess of York. Who buys these books? Why would anyone seek to discover Fergie's mealtime tips? Does she look like she cooks? At the high end, the more specialized end, consider "The Medieval Kitchen," by Odile Redon, Françoise Sabban, and



Recent food writing reveals a little secret of top chefs: they cook with fat!

Silvano Serventi (Chicago; $32.50), which will give you a recipe for the grape-and-garlic sauce, to be used on meat or fish, that Maestro Martino served to the Patriarch of Aquileia in mid-fifteenth-century Rome. In Maria Dembrinska and William Weaver's "Food and Drink in Medieval Poland" (Pennsylvania; $20), you can learn how to make Trójniak Pomorski, though you'd better have some wheat beer on hand. If you want to venture beyond Europe, there's Phyllis Pray Bober's "Art, Culture, and Cuisine: Ancient and Medieval Gastronomy" (Chicago; $50), which will tell you how to put together an ancient Mesopotamian mold of bulgur and green wheat. (Courage! There's a date sauce to go with it.) But why limit yourself to eating? In 1990, Bedford Arts, in San Francisco, reprinted F. T. Marinetti's 1932 "Futurist Cookbook," with a recipe for Raw Meat Torn by Trumpet Blasts. (This involves your going back and forth between eating electrified beef and blowing on a trumpet.) If you prefer something without electricity, how about the "Star Trek Cookbook," by Ethan Phillips and William J. Birnes (Pocket Books; $20), with recipes for "Gagh," "Heart of Targ," and "Blood Pie," this last involving a plate of pumpkin-pie filling with a turnip "sticking up straight to look fibrous and hairy." The photographs are terrifying.

THE pop, the learned, the ironic: America's food revolution has entered its late phase. This can be seen even in what were once fortresses of normality—for example, the *Times*. As I recall the paper's food coverage in the old days, it was Craig Claiborne telling you something interesting to cook on the weekend and Pierre Franey telling you something fast to cook tonight. Now, as everyone knows, the paper's food writing occupies a whole weekly section, a veritable magazine, called "Dining In / Dining Out." But you have to look hard in it to find something to cook tonight. It is aimed not at regular people but at "foodies." The lead article in an issue this past spring tells how a number of New York's top chefs now consult a French fortune-teller named Jérôme Basset, at three hundred and twenty-five dollars per session, before making any important decision. ("I would never have opened Prime in Las

PETER CAMPBELL

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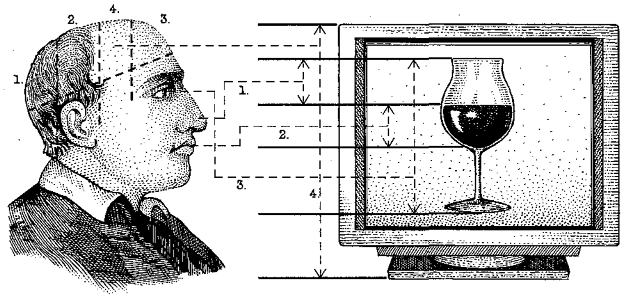

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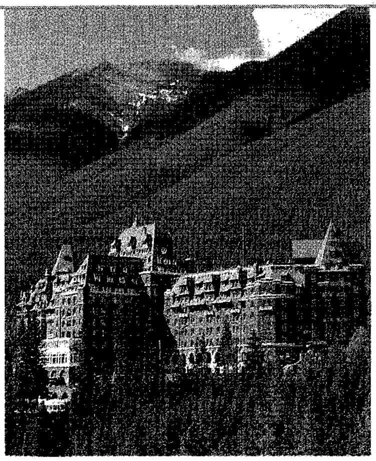

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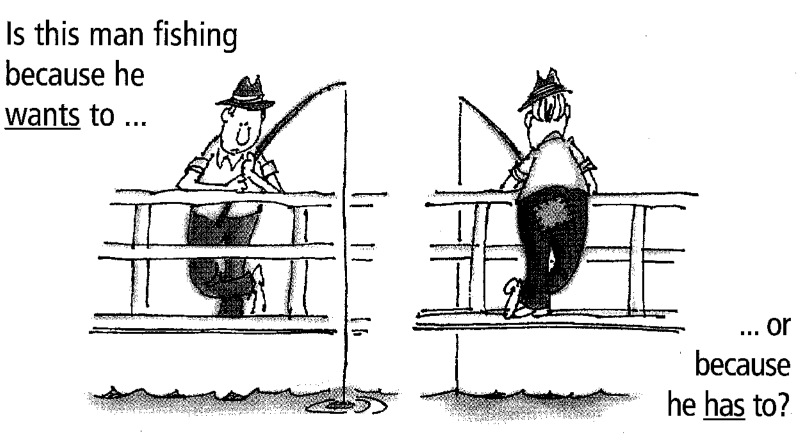
Vegas or Vong in Chicago if Jérôme hadn't given me the clear-sailing sign," says Jean-Georges Vongerichten, of Jo Jo.) Moving down the page, we find a report on the new, coming cuisine, Peruvian, with special emphasis on Japanese-Peruvian fusion. This is accompanied by a recipe for a nice-sounding fish dish, but since it calls for a tablespoon of yuzu juice (available by mail from Young Land Trading, 718-229-5535), don't plan on making it anytime soon. Turn the pages and you will find articles on a new fruit (baby seedless tangerines, available at only one known location, 1367 Coney Island Avenue, in Brooklyn), a new herb (baby cilantro, apparently different from the grownup kind), a new pastry (a cross between a croissant and a pretzel, again available in only one store), a new food scare (you can get shigellosis from parsley!), and a restaurant that, though not new, will serve you crab pizza with melted brie. In other recent issues, we got instructions for ramp-gathering, a review of three sugars made from cane grown in volcanic soil on the island of Mauritius, information on which chefs are now posing naked for Vita-Mix blender ads, and a recipe for corn ice cream.

A turn toward the bizarre can also be observed in the food memoir, or whatever we want to call that genre of book in which the author, while talking about food, basically writes a personal testament. The classic is Brillat-Savarin's 1825 "Physiology of Taste," just republished in M. F. K. Fisher's beautiful translation (Counterpoint; $35). Brillat-Savarin thought he was writing a scientific treatise, so we have to hear quite a lot about the three stages of tasting, the six causes of thirst, and so on. But inside this *encyclopédiste* was a thoughtful, witty man who repeatedly got out. It was Brillat-Savarin who established, as a modern literary convention, the *moral* discussion of food. Gourmandise, or good eating, was to him a virtue, "an implicit obedience of the rules of the Creator." (It also had eleven advantages. It improved marriages, made women plump, brought money into France, et cetera.) He felt that he could know humankind through food, and by telling us his conclusions he tells us about himself.

This is one of the most pleasing forms of autobiography. M. F. K. Fisher was its foremost practitioner in our time,



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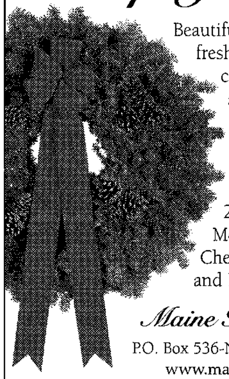

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but the spirit of Brillat-Savarin—and Fisher—informs much of good culinary writing, for example, Raymond Sokolov's now reprinted "Fading Feast" (Godine; $16.95), a 1981 book of essays on America's disappearing regional foods, including roast goose. Geese, Sokolov says, are estimable animals: "They can be taught to herd sheep, and they also make good watchdogs. . . . They will come when called, untie your shoes, or take the valve cap off automobile tires." But, unfortunately for them, they cannot be raised in confinement. If you crowd them together in a coop, their feet swell, and they get mad and start attacking one another. Furthermore, a goose lays only about forty eggs a season, while your average chicken will lay two hundred. Consequently, geese are vanishing from the nation's heartland. Sokolov's essay is a responsible piece of food writing, with historical quotes and a recipe and information on pinfeathers, but it is also a secretly tender philosophical inquiry—an elegy in a country barnyard, a meditation on what is, so often, the bad luck of being what one is and, in our day, the uselessness of knowing how to remove valve caps if one cannot also lay two hundred eggs a season in a space one foot square. This is *cuisine moralisée*, classic food writing.

In a number of recent food memoirs—for example, Michael Lee West's "Consuming Passions" (HarperCollins; $25)—we find something more postclassical. Michael Lee West is Southern and, despite the name, female, so a lot of the book is about what Mama said. And what Mama doesn't say, Mimi (grandmother) does, or Aunt Tempe or Aunt Hettie or Aunt Dell. On almost any given night during West's youth, two or more of these ladies could be found sitting on the porch talking about how to fry things and who got killed. Mostly, it's men who get killed. What with all those fried foods, "a number of brothers-in-law died in their sleep," but they don't seem to have been missed much. Basically, men don't matter, because men don't cook. Except Uncle Bun. Bun made legendary barbecue, but that was before he went to South America and came back with Sidone, the Brazilian nymphomaniac. Sidone adapted poorly to life in Independence, Louisiana. She'd tell Bun she was going to town to do her fabric shopping, and then she'd come home covered with hickeys. Bun eventually went insane and had to be placed in a special home. Sidone got murdered—she had it coming. West chronicles other deaths, plus some close calls. (Aunt Tempe, on her deathbed: "I see a tunnel. Why, there's Mama! And her mama!" After this vision, she felt better and got up and lived for a number of years more.) Along the way, we get recipes for coconut cake, black-eyed peas, and cocktail franks in grape-jelly sauce. This is the only Southern Gothic food comedy I have ever read.

In its portrait of a community of women, it is also a product of feminism, and not the only one to arrive on the cookery shelf lately. Another is "Tender at the Bone" (Random House; $23), by Ruth Reichl, former restaurant critic of the *Times* and now the editor-in-chief of *Gourmet*. "Tender at the Bone"

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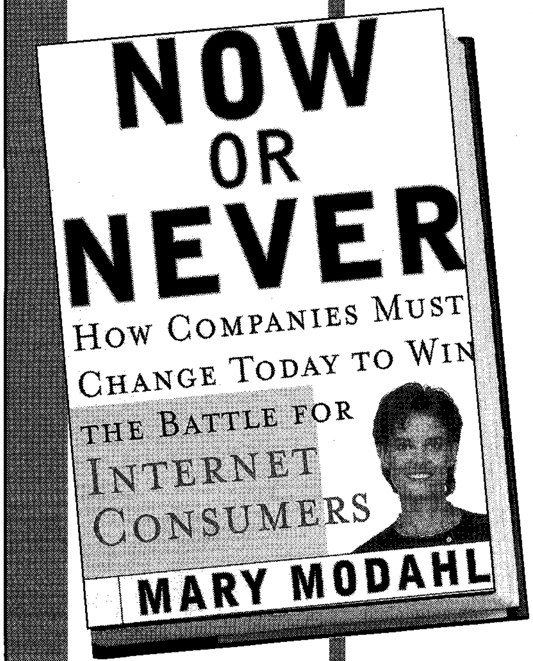
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is probably the only food memoir, ever, to begin with a scene of attempted poisoning. It's breakfast time in the Reichl household. "Try this," Ruthie's mother says to her husband, and pops something into his mouth:

> Whatever it tasted like, he said it was the worst thing he had ever had in his mouth . . . so terrible that he leaned over and spit it into the sink and then grabbed the coffeepot, put the spout into his mouth, and tried to eradicate the flavor.
>
> My mother . . . smiled and said, "Just as I thought. Spoiled!"

This is not the only time Mrs. Reichl nearly killed somebody. Twenty-six guests at a party she threw had to have their stomachs pumped that night. After such an opening, we expect something on the order of the "Futurist Cookbook." Alas, Mrs. Reichl is put on lithium and fades into the background. Without her antic contribution, the book becomes less a food memoir than a "woman's memoir," and not a very good one. Still, it's a new direction in culinary writing: my weight problems, my panic attacks, and, in between, my recipe for sauerbraten.

I GUESS this was bound to happen—that food would eventually invade new media and new genres, and change accordingly. One territory in which it has settled down for a long stay is academic writing. Until the mid-century, nobody in the university except the anthropologists cared much about food. Then we had the ideological revolutions of the sixties and seventies. Together with women, blacks, and the other things that white men had ignored, in came food, the thing that women—and black people (all those cooks)—had cared about, indeed spent their lives caring about, for so many centuries. New York University now offers a degree in Food Studies. Scholars hold conferences on food, assemble textbooks on the subject—for example, "Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food" (Indiana; $45), which offers commentaries stretching from Plato to Buffalo Bird Woman. By reading therein, says the co-editor, Lisa M. Heldke, who teaches philosophy at Gustavus Adolphus College, "one can begin to transform philosophical ignorance of and disrespect for foodmaking into philosophical understanding of, and involvement in, it."

This sounds dangerous, but in fact

POSTSCRIPT

BALANCING ACT

MAGAZINE wizards appear and flourish, and afterward their successors struggle to duplicate the mysterious alignment of forces with which a George Lorimer, a Frank Crowninshield, or a Carmel Snow captured and shaped the public imagination. In our time, nobody filled this role more grandly and completely than Alexander Liberman, who died on November 19th, at the age of eighty-seven.

In his prime as the longtime editorial director of Condé Nast (from 1962 to 1994), the Russian-born Liberman brought his protean sensibility to bear on more than a dozen different magazines, overseeing everything from picture captions and layouts to top-level staff and corporate decisions. He was autocratic, extravagant, charming, and occasionally devious—Diana Vreeland and Grace Mirabella both felt betrayed by Liberman when they were fired (not by him) as *Vogue's* editor-in-chief. He never lost his ability to stay ahead of the curve in magazine publishing, anticipating shifts in taste, spotting new talent, rejuvenating tired franchises and inventing new ones, pushing others to go beyond themselves in pursuit of fresh material and new ways to present it. "The one clear idea that I brought was the idea of anti-design," he said, toward the end of his life. "What is design? It's making the use of the material—the way it's used—more important than the material itself. . . . I came to believe in the unexpected, in chance, in doing things that didn't conform to any established design principles."

He could take all sorts of risks in his magazine work, partly because he believed that his true métier lay elsewhere. Liberman was that oddity—a salaried company man with another life as a serious artist. His austere abstract paintings of the late nineteen-forties and fifties, shown at the Betty Parsons Gallery and collected by the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan, anticipated minimal art by a decade. In the sixties, he turned to sculpture—huge welded-metal pieces, which found buyers throughout the world, and established him as one of the most prolific public artists of his time. How good was he? Some critics, put off by his career at glossy magazines, dismissed him as a dilettante. Others, including Thomas B. Hess and Robert Hughes, considered him a major talent. According to Hess, Liberman was underrated by the New York art world because "he's done too many things too well." An expert photographer who maintained that photographs were not and could not be works of art, Liberman nevertheless produced a substantial body of work in that medium, including, in his 1960 book, "The Artist in His Studio," an indispensable record of the working spaces and materials of the School of Paris.

Friends often asked him why he didn't devote himself full time to painting and sculpture. He never did, and the reason may have had something to do with the qualities that made him so good with magazines. Liberman's lightness of touch and his capacity for fun and innovation kept him afloat for half a century in the treacherous waters of high-stakes publishing. In Paris after the war, he learned, through forays into the lives and the studios of Picasso, Braque, Léger, Giacometti, Chagall, and other artists, that greatness required sacrifices he was not prepared to make. "The life of the artist is quite horrible," he once said. "There is no success in art. I always felt that life was more important."

Magazines were more like life. "Alex, after all, this is just entertainment," Vreeland told him. "And, of course, she was right," Liberman said later. "Producing a fashion magazine is theatre. You have to have variety, surprise, contrast, pace, and not attach enormous importance to any of it, because it's fleeting. You make a decision, it's printed, it's gone."

—CALVIN TOMKINS

Alexander Liberman photographed by Irving Penn in 1977.

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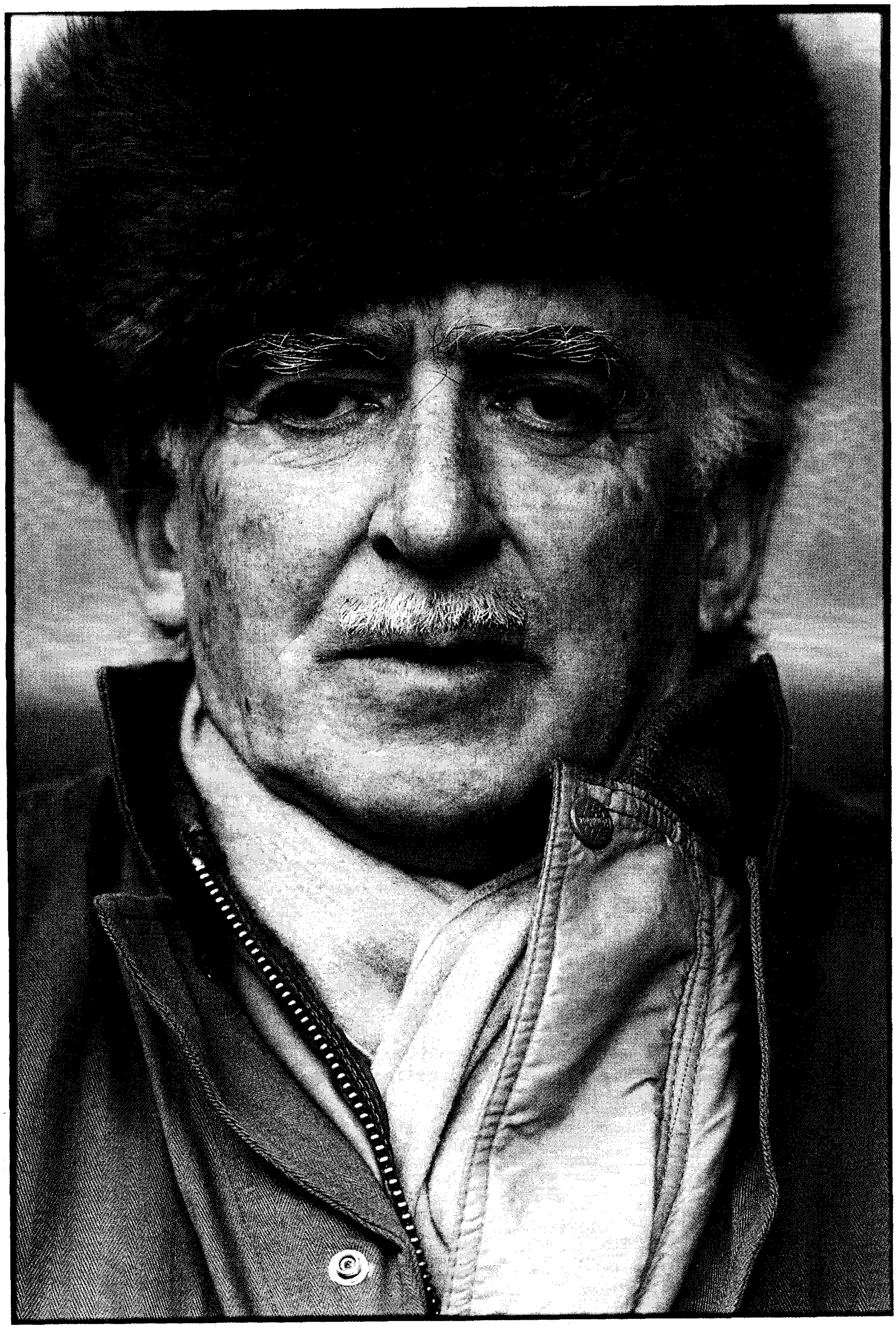

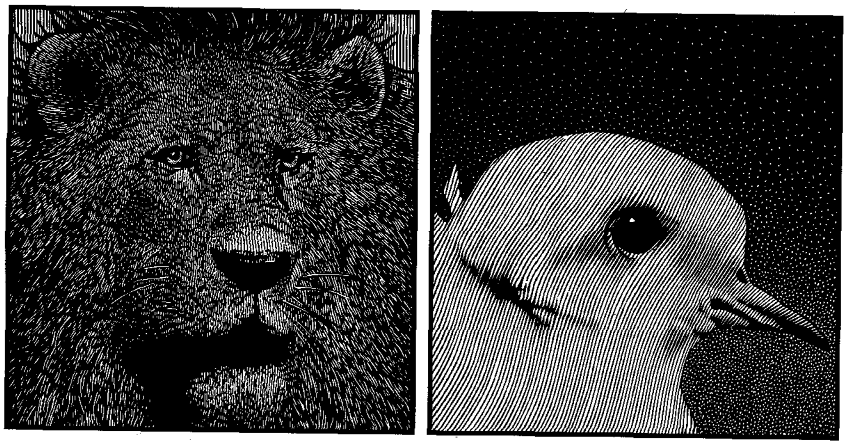

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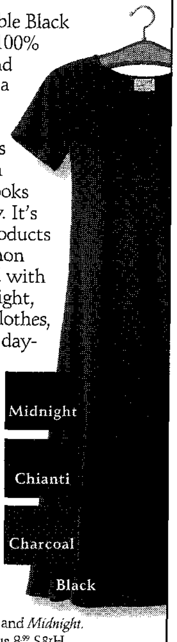

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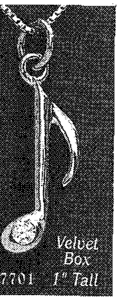

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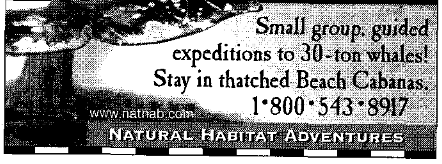

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NATURAL HABITAT ADVENTURES

food has had a good influence on scholarship. There are now a number of excellent food histories out there: "Culture and Cuisine," by the French political writer Jean-François Revel, the author of "Without Marx or Jesus"; "Food in History," by Reay Tannahill (Three Rivers; $16); "A History of Food," by Maguellone Toussaint-Samat (Blackwell; $29.95); "Paradox of Plenty" by Harvey Levenstein (Oxford; $30). This last is a book full of wonderful facts. It is not true, Levenstein says, that cottage cheese and ketchup was Richard Nixon's idea of a lunchtime treat. He ate that only to keep his weight down. It is true, though, that Lyndon Johnson had a Fresca-piping drinking fountain installed outside the Oval Office. And, by the way, according to Tannahill, researchers at Harvard Medical School have reported that the Coca-Cola douche is a rather good contraceptive, stopping ninety-one per cent of sperm in its tracks. You have to use Classic Coke, though, not the new formula.

In these books and others, we can survey the history we have been condemned to repeat. As anyone knows who has read ancient literature, the far territories of food connoisseurship were not charted for the first time in the nineteen-nineties. Dinner among the Greeks was a simple affair—the classical scholar Sir Alfred Zimmern described it as consisting of two courses, "the first a kind of porridge, and the second a kind of porridge"—but Roman high cuisine was notoriously, violently luxurious. Trimalchio's feast in Petronius' "Satyricon" is satire, but it gives us some idea of what was being satirized, and the first known cookbook, hailing from Rome between the first and third centuries A.D., records related extravagances: dishes of flamingo tongues, camel heels, pork raised on figs and wine. The moneyed folk of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were not behindhand, and they, like the Romans, delighted in "surprise" dishes. A favorite was pastry with unaccustomed fillings, and four-and-twenty blackbirds were nothing. A banquet in Lille in 1433 featured a pie containing a twenty-eight-piece orchestra (alive). Reading these stories, one feels a little less bad about Japan's ultra-prime Wagyu beef, from cattle raised on sake-soaked grain, massages, and acupunc-

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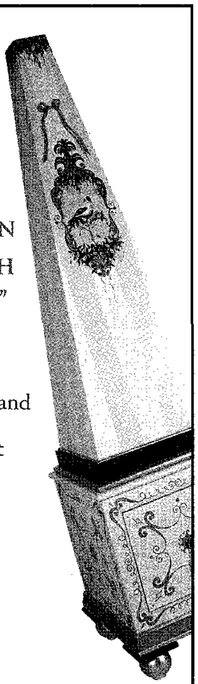

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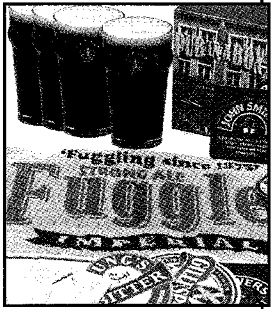

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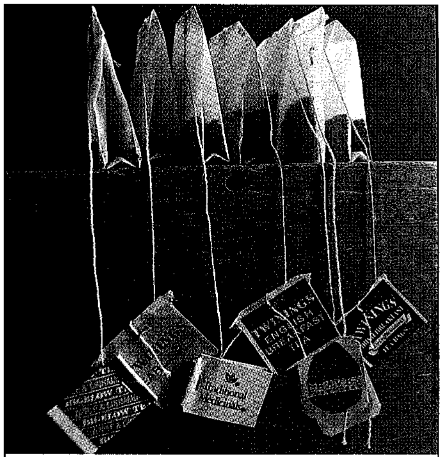

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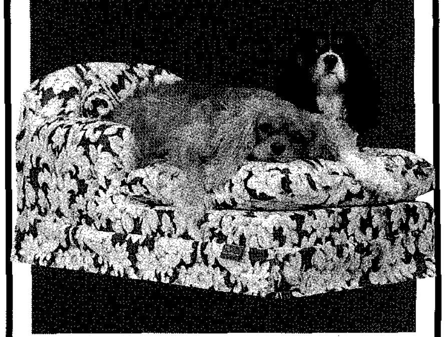

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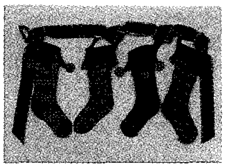

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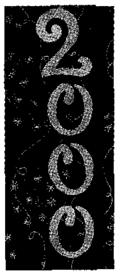

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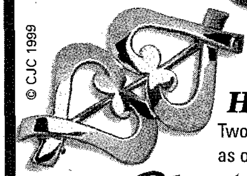

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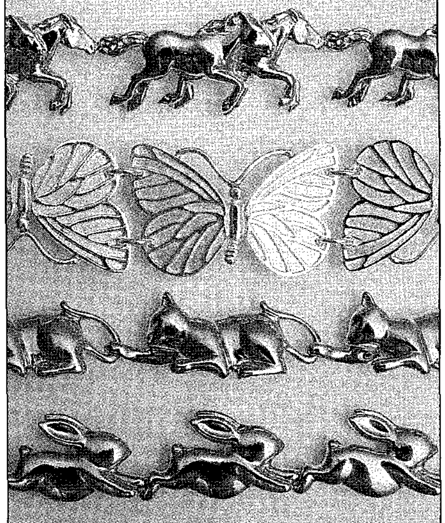

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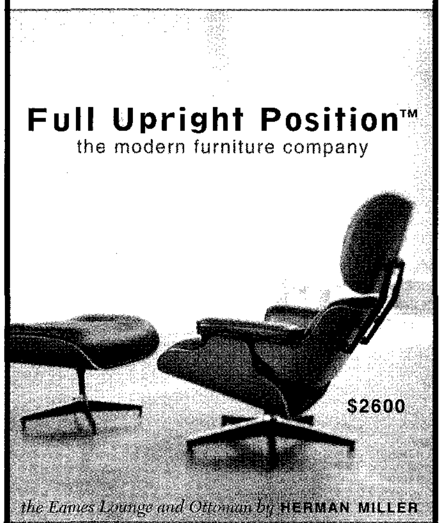

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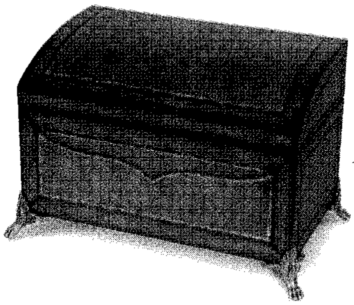

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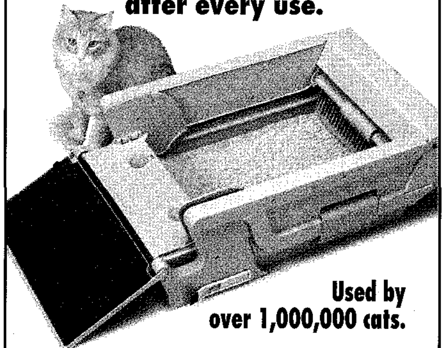

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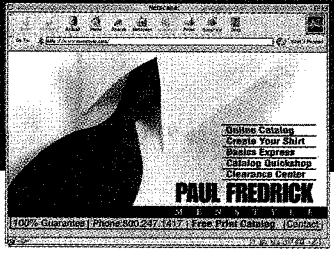

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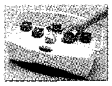

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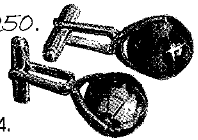

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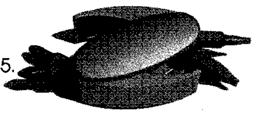

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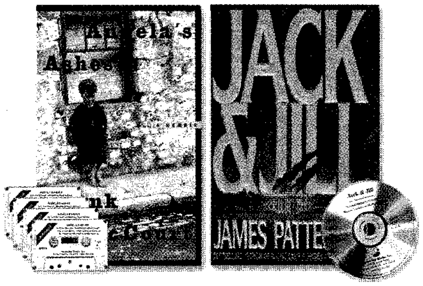

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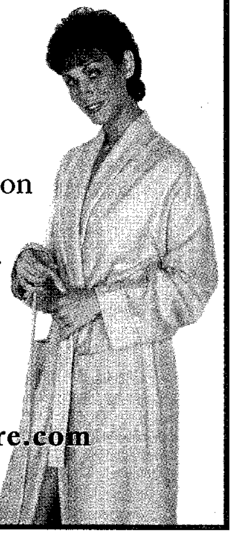

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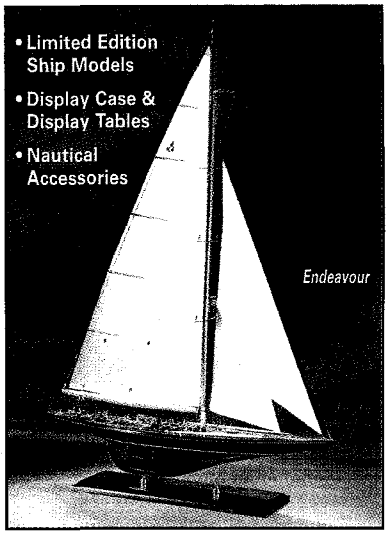

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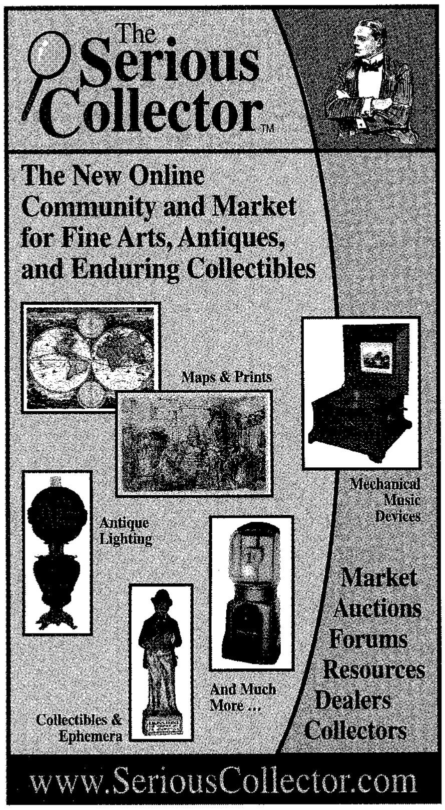

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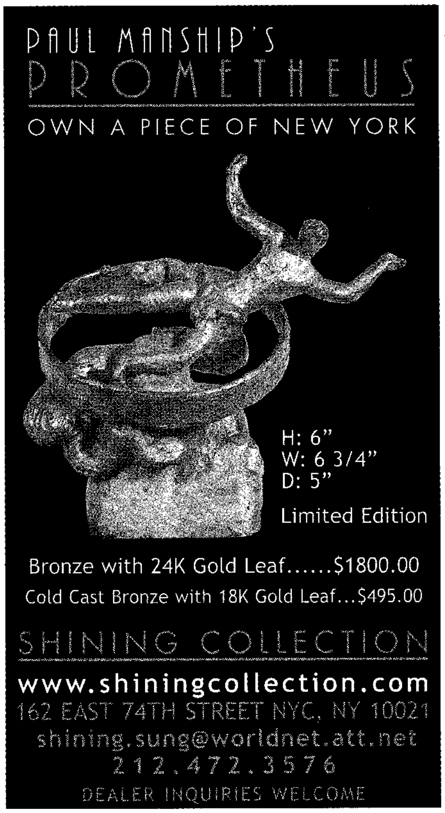

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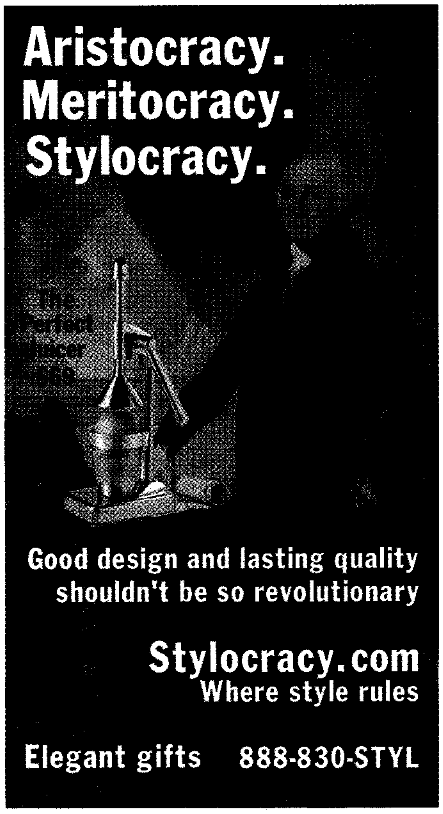

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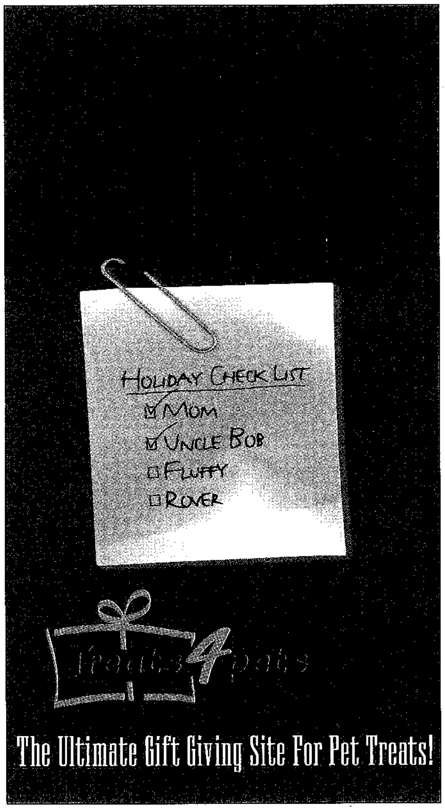

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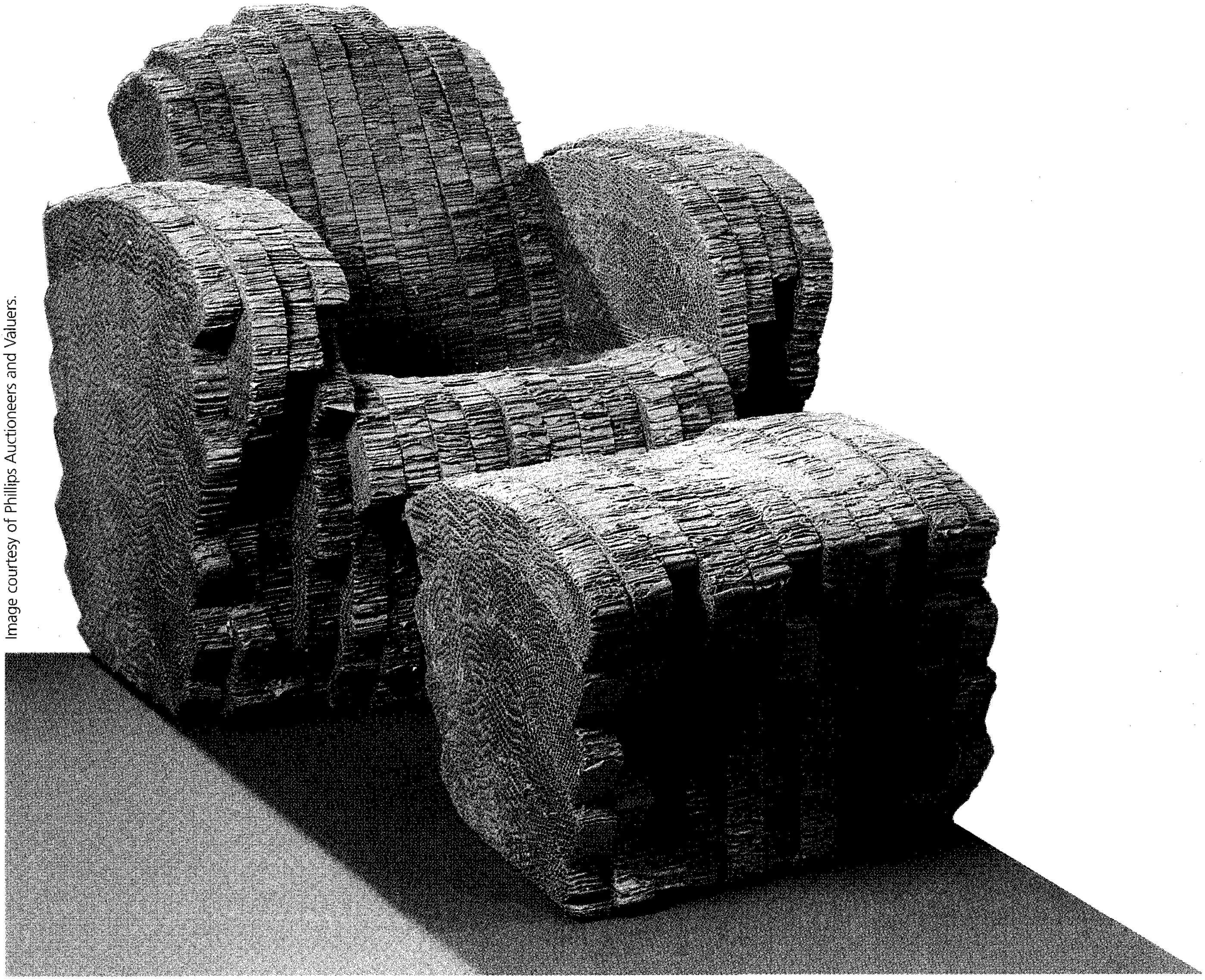
Actually, there's a lot to feel less bad about—how much you drink, for example. According to Wolfgang Schivelbusch's wonderful book "Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants" (Vintage; $13), the average person in late-seventeenth-century England, including the average child, consumed three litres of beer a day. (The family breakfast normally consisted of beer soup. Schivelbusch gives a recipe.) Nor should you give another thought to your table manners. In the Middle Ages, Redon and her colleagues tell us, it was O.K. to wipe your hands on the tablecloth, but not to blow your nose on it. That was rude. So, Tannahill says, was scratching your codwear, for this would send lice flying.

Which brings us to hygiene. The average medieval family emptied out its stock pot once a year, for Lent. Whatever you had on hand on a given day, you threw it into the pot, where it simmered with the remains of what you had had yesterday, not to speak of last summer. Then you ate it. In "Bread of Dreams" (Chicago; $17), the Italian literary historian Piero Camporesi argues that as a result of rotted bread, among other causes, most of the people of pre-industrial Europe lived their whole lives in a state of narcosis—a circumstance that to him explains not just the witchcraft crazes but also the fevered faith and visionary arts of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

All this is absorbing to read. The radical historians of the sixties and seventies were right. We had heard enough about Napoleon. We needed to know how ordinary people lived their lives, and what they thought about the world. By watching them eat, we can discover a lot about them, in a concrete, almost poetic way—and in a highly reliable way. Dinner does not lie. When Simon Schama, in "The Embarrassment of Riches" (Vintage; $22), a history of Dutch culture in the seventeenth century, tells us that in 1654 the Dutch Navy's diet consisted of forty-eight hundred calories per man per day, we learn not just about the Netherlanders' prosperity and decency but also about their common sense. Well-fed sailors fight better, and the Dutch Navy was

This should put you at ease with the internet.



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the master of its chosen seas. And in the weekly round of midday meals at the Leiden poorhouse—"vegetable soup and some sort of meat stew . . . on Sundays and Wednesdays, a porridge of grits, butter, and sweet milk on Mondays and Saturdays," et cetera—we can read something about the Dutch Reformed Church's notion of charity. No wonder Rembrandt's subjects look like people you would want to know.

The Dutch Reformed was not the only church, however. The Calvinists had made inroads, and in seventeenth-century Holland they were the leaders of the food puritanism that throughout history seems to have accompanied great feasting. The naysayers were worse in the old days, because their argument was from religion more than from health. It was not so much your body as your immortal soul that you were endangering by eating that twelfth waffle. According to Schama, the conservative clergy especially condemned the excesses surrounding saints' days, which to them smacked of "Baal worship." In Delft, in 1607, they got the magistracy to outlaw gingerbread men—effigies, as they saw them—in time for the feast of St. Nicholas.

But people in the old days certainly knew that their health was affected by what they ate. Until the mid-eighteenth century, most medicine consisted of dietary prescriptions. Tobacco was highly recommended—very good for you. Sugar, too, was wholesome; doctors often prescribed it. Likewise chocolate. "It has produced good results in cases of chronic illness," Brillat-Savarin writes. Coffee, which arrived in Europe from the Near East in the late seventeenth century, was thought to have near-miraculous effects: it kept you awake, industrious, chaste, and cheerful. It also cured venereal disease. Fruit, on the other hand, could be very bad for you, according to the four-humors theory that dominated much of Eastern and Western medicine from ancient times until the eighteenth century. In particular, fruit was harmful to children; it was forbidden to babies and wet-nurses. Tannahill believes this rule may have contributed substantially to infant mortality in pre-industrial Europe.

Having reviewed the dietary wis-

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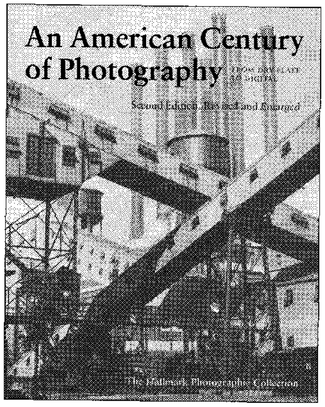
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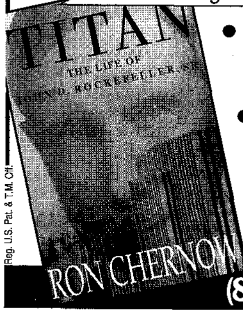

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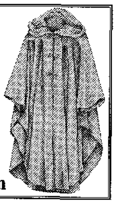

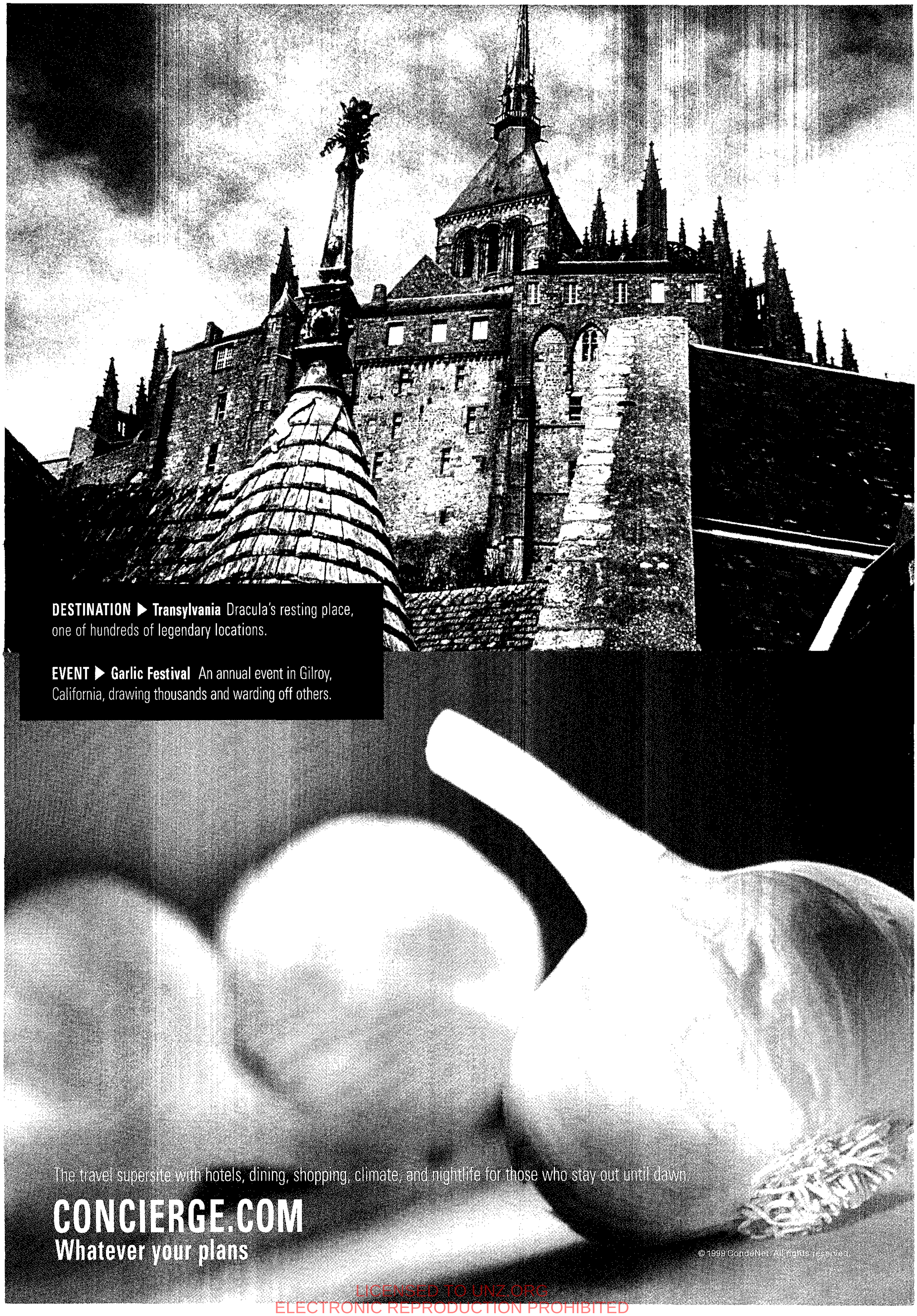

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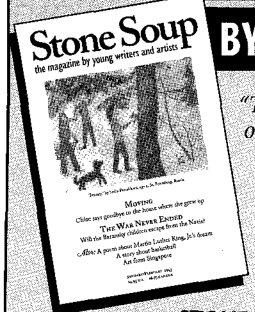

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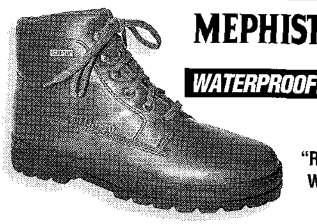
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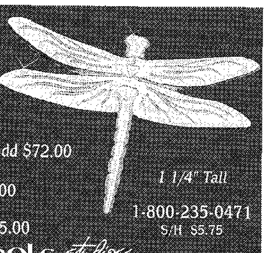
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dom of the ages, many food writers cast a cold eye on modern nutritional dogma. In two swift pages, Tannahill assembles evidence discrediting the current bans on salt, sugar, and saturated fats. (She thinks the campaign to purify our diet of these ingredients is, in part, a rechannelling of the will to superiority that once powered purification campaigns against blacks and Jews.) The *Vogue* food writer Jeffrey Steingarten, in his superb collection "The Man Who Ate Everything" (Vintage; $14), devotes a fierce essay to each of the three food bans. He adds an essay, "Salad the Silent Killer," on the perils of eating green vegetables. I had forgotten that Abraham Lincoln's mother died from drinking milk tainted by snakeroot.

The new Calvinists are not likely to be shaken by such chastisement. Nevertheless, I notice that many of the new cookbooks seem never to have heard of cholesterol. "Slather on large quantities of mayonnaise" when you make that bacon-and-fried-green-tomato sandwich, Michael Lee West tells us. A while ago, I turned on cable TV's Food Network at six o'clock and watched David Rosengarten, of "Taste," prepare fettuccine Alfredo. At six-thirty, on "In Food Today," the guest chef Wayne Brackman made chocolate fondue. At seven, on "Cooking Live," Sara Moulton was scrambling eggs. A few days later, I turned on "Two Fat Ladies," a cult favorite, and found the hosts, Jennifer Paterson (who has since died) and Clarissa Dickson Wright, smearing pigeons with butter. ("Make sure you use double cream for the potato cakes," Paterson told us.) But then I doubt that either Wright or Paterson ever saw a low-cholesterol dish. Paterson was indeed a fat lady—so is Wright—and they probably wouldn't have been allowed anywhere near a TV camera when *cuisine minceur* was king. As final proof that things have eased up, a recent front-page article in the *Times* food section shared with us a "little secret of top chefs." They cook with fat! This was accompanied by a photograph of Rocco DiSpirito, of Union Pacific, poaching halibut steaks in a *quart* of goose grease.

Along with the anti-Puritanism, we have now had, for a number of years, a major anti-snob putsch. Both Stein-

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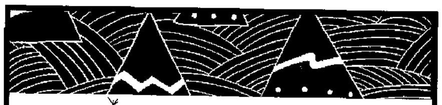
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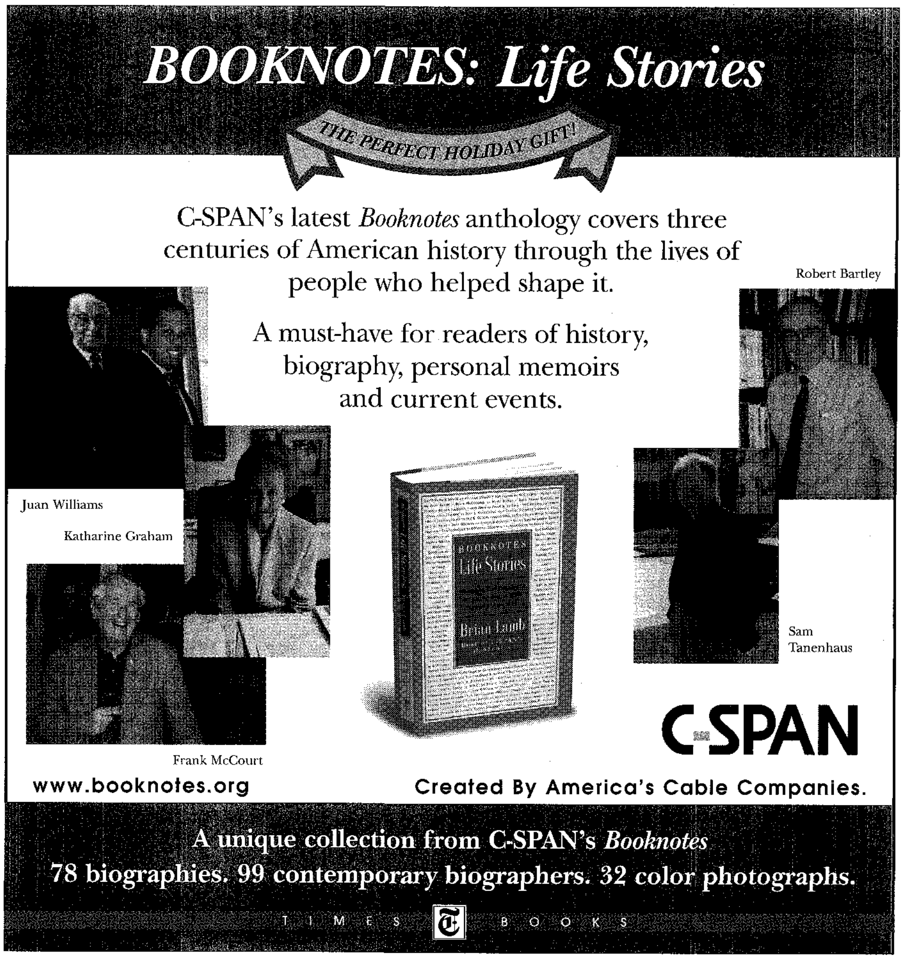
garten's and Sokolov's collections offer appreciative essays on ketchup. Indeed, there is a whole book on that once despised substance: "Pure Ketchup," by Andrew Smith (South Carolina; $24), who has taught culinary history at the New School. (Smith's latest book is on popcorn. "Cultural studies" is no doubt lurking in the background here.) Meanwhile, asking for a bottle of ketchup in one of New York's cutting-edge restaurants will still win you a pitying look from your waiter.

BUT that's the way it is in food land these days: you get a new trend every minute, and don't expect the old one to go away. Vegans and Wagyu, *fleur de sel* and road food, snobbery and anti-snobbery: they're all out there, ready for a fight. If this confuses you, just forget about it, because to most people in the United States it means absolutely nothing. America's kitchen is much more like your mother's kitchen than you think. Though in New York and Berkeley people may be paying ten dollars a pound for fiddlehead ferns, the average American spends four dollars a day on food. (This is less than half what the Japanese spend.) While knowledge about food and cooking has vastly increased over the past few decades, it is nevertheless true that every night across this land a million cans of Campbell's soup, usually cream of mushroom, are opened, to flavor—or be—dinner. And that's in the houses where people are turning on the stove. Insofar as there have been societywide changes in America's eating habits, there is one cause: women's going to work. In my building, in food-wild Manhattan, there are eleven households. Two have young children. If you call the elevator at 6 P.M., chances are you will run into a man carrying a pizza or a man carrying a bag with a Chinese menu stapled to it. They are bringing dinner to the families with the children. And the only reason you don't find food being delivered to the other apartments is that those people picked up takeout on their way home from work. In September, 1989, the Gallup pollsters called up Americans at dinnertime and asked them what they were eating. "Almost half," Harvey Levenstein reports, "were sitting down to frozen, packaged, or take-out meals." ♦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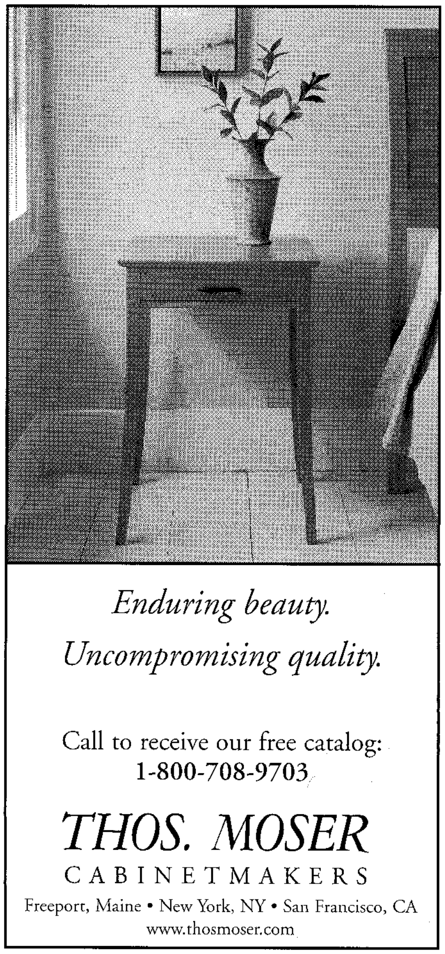
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Choose your favorite books of 1999

Dear Reader,

What were the best books published this year?

For the first time in nearly seventy-five years of publishing, The New Yorker, a magazine that prizes literary excellence, will award prizes for literary excellence. And we're asking our readers to be the judges. Who's better qualified?

The prizes will recognize works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. A shortlist of five titles in each category has been prepared with the help of some illustrious writers: in fiction, Richard Ford and Jhumpa Lahiri; in nonfiction, Ann Douglas and Jonathan Harr; in poetry, Mark Strand and Susan Wheeler. The final decisions are yours.

You can vote by phone, fax, or E-mail, or by mailing the printed ballot below. But you can vote only once, and you must vote soon. The deadline is January 14, 2000, so that we can announce the winners on February 14th, the seventy-fifth anniversary of this magazine.

There are all kinds of book prizes: the Pulitzer, the National Book Awards, the PEN/Faulkner—and, of course, Oprah. But this is the only prize we know of that lets the reader decide the winner. So please vote.

SELECT ONE FROM EACH CATEGORY

BEST FICTION 1999

☐ **A STAR CALLED HENRY**
by Roddy Doyle (Viking)
A history of Ireland as told by Henry Smart, a philandering, thuggish good-for-nothing who somehow manages always to do good.

☐ **PLAINSONG**
by Kent Haruf (Knopf)
The story of a small town in Colorado—and the steady, uncontrolled sexuality that seems to run through it.

☐ **HUMMINGBIRD HOUSE**
by Patricia Henley (MacMurray & Beck)
An intensely felt account of being an American, trying to do the right thing, during the troubles in Guatemala.

☐ **A GESTURE LIFE**
by Chang-rae Lee (Riverhead)
A Korean pharmacist in New England is haunted by the atrocities inflicted on the "comfort women" when he was serving in the Japanese Army in the Second World War.

☐ **CLOSE RANGE**
by Annie Proulx (Scribner)
Grimm's Fairy Tales as reconceived in the high plains of Wyoming. Cow handlers, bar girls, bad boys, rodeo hands, and two cowboys who discover the love that dare not speak its name.

BEST NONFICTION 1999

☐ **THE ELEGANT UNIVERSE**
by Brian Greene (Norton)
How relativity and quantum mechanics might come together in a grand, unified "theory of everything."

☐ **THE BIG TEST: THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN MERITOCRACY**
by Nicholas Lemann (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)
The Educational Testing Service propelled the rise of a new élite, but with unbargained-for consequences.

☐ **OUT OF PLACE: A MEMOIR**
by Edward W. Said (Knopf)
An eminent literary scholar tells of growing up in the Middle East and the United States—a Christian among Muslims, an Arab among Americans.

☐ **THE IMMACULATE INVASION**
by Bob Shacochis (Viking)
Eighteen months with Special Forces commandos in Haiti, during Operation Uphold Democracy.

☐ **MORGAN: AMERICAN FINANCIER**
by Jean Strouse (Random House)
A biography finds much to admire in the bogeyman of capitalism.

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by Louise Glück (Ecco)
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☐ **THE CONSTRUCTOR**
by John Koethe (HarperFlamingo/HarperCollins)
A philosopher's meditation—evocative of Ashbery and Stevens—on the value of consciousness.

☐ **POEMS**
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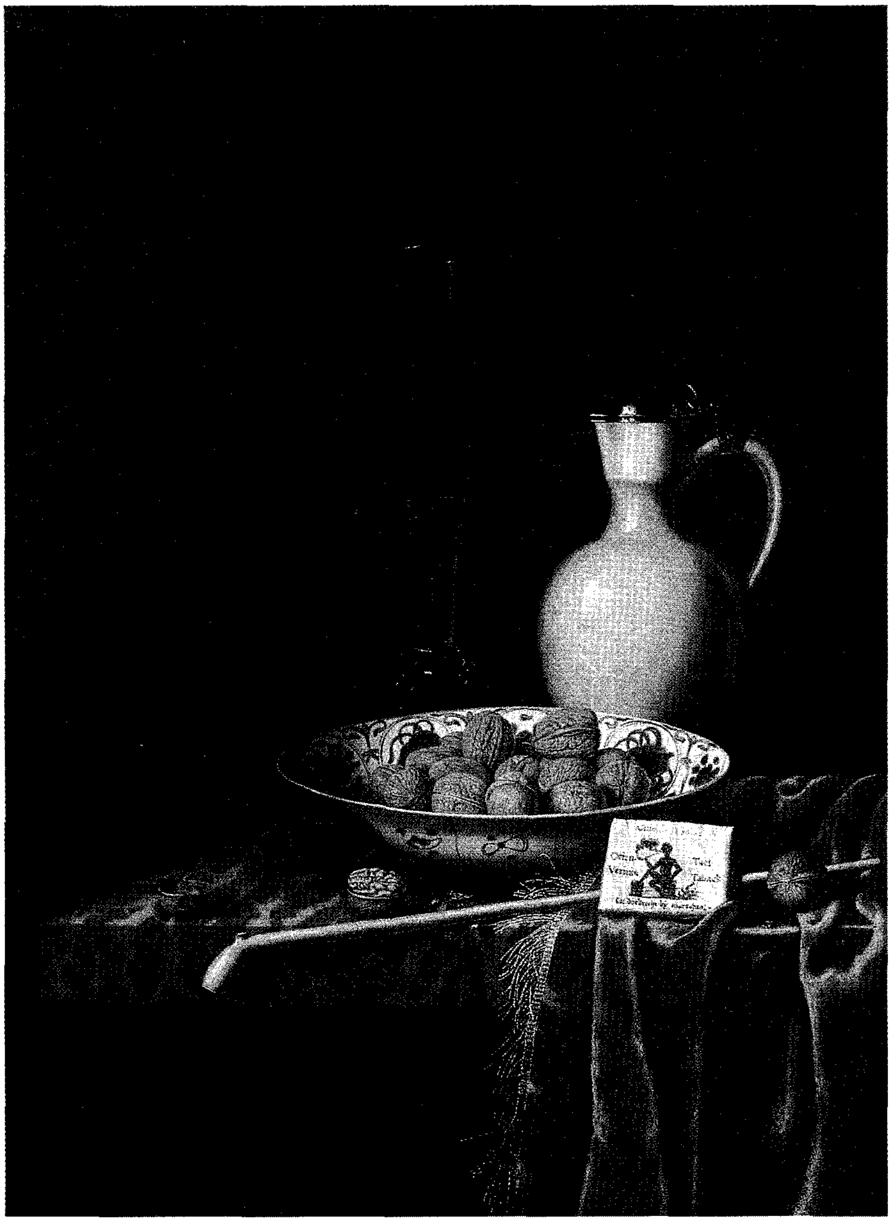
SWEEPSTAKES RULES
1. NO PURCHASE NECESSARY
2. How to enter: All entries must be either on the official entry form or on a facsimile of a blank entry form, or by phone, fax or Web site as otherwise provided in this paragraph. Complete the questionnaire and print your name, your complete address, and your telephone number. Then mail the enclosed postage-paid reply card (or a facsimile in an envelope) to: The New Yorker Poll, P.O. Box 981024, El Paso, TX 79998. Entries must be received by January 14, 2000. The New Yorker is not responsible for lost, late, postage-due, or misdirected mail. You may also enter by dialing 800-246-1400 or via The New Yorker's Web site at www.newyorker.com. Only one entry per person permitted. 3. The grand-prize winner will be chosen in a random drawing of all completed questionnaires on or about February 11, 2000, by The Willard & Shullman Group Inc., and will be notified by mail or phone within two weeks of the drawing. All decisions by the judges are final. The grand prize is not transferable. 4. The trip will include hotel accommodations (double occupancy) for the winner and a guest for two nights in London and three days and three nights at Llangoed Hall in Wales, round-trip coach air transportation on British Airways from the major commercial airport nearest the winner's home in the U.S., airport transfers, ground transportation, meals (up to a specified limit), and tickets to the Hay Festival events. Additional transportation and other expenses are not included. Scheduling is subject to availability and blackout dates; certain restrictions may apply. Travel must be completed during the Hay Festival program in 2000. Total retail value of the grand prize is approximately $5,000, depending on point of origin. 5. Income and other taxes, if any, are the sole responsibility of the winner. No substitutions for the prizes will be allowed, except by The New Yorker in case of unavailability, in which case a prize of equal or greater value will be substituted. 6. All entries become the property of The New Yorker and will not be acknowledged or returned. 7. Sweepstakes is open to residents of the forty-eight contiguous United States who are 18 years or older as of February 11, 2000, except employees of the Condé Nast Publications, and the families of the preceding. Subject to all federal, state, and local laws and regulations. Void outside the 48 contiguous states and where prohibited. Odds of winning depend on the number of entries received. 8. Acceptance of prize constitutes consent to use the winner's name and likeness for editorial, advertising, and publicity purposes. The winner will be required to sign an Affidavit of Eligibility, and winner and guest will be required to sign a Liability/Publicity release which must be returned within ten days from date of notification or an alternate winner may be chosen. 9. Participants agree to be bound by the above rules and regulations. 10. For the name of the winner, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to The New Yorker Book Awards Sweepstakes Winner, 4 Times Square, 21st Floor, New York, NY 10036. Attention: Editorial Promotion, after March 1, 2000.



Hubert van Ravesteyn's "Walnuts, a Tobacco Packet, and a White Jug on a Table" (1671): Art for a stuff-intoxicated age.

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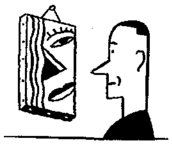
THE ART WORLD

GOING DUTCH

Still-life magic from the Netherlands, in Cleveland.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



I MAY never have been less excited by the prospect of an Old Master exhibition than I was before seeing "Still-Life Paintings from the Netherlands: 1550-1720," at the Cleveland Museum of Art. All my museumgoing career, I've walked past Dutch and Flemish still-lifes on my way from one to another of the portraits, interiors, landscapes, and so on—every kind of picture, each done to everlasting death in oils—that make seventeenth-century Netherlands the painting-fancier's cynosure. I've confirmed, by asking several people of my acquaintance, that I wasn't alone in lacking an appetite for all those preening flowers, foodstuffs, and bric-a-brac. Now that I have been converted by the Cleveland show, which includes seventy-one topnotch paintings, by fifty artists (and will stay on view until January 9th and won't travel), my former aversion fascinates me.

It is partly a museum-induced disorder, I've decided. No other class of painting suffers more than Dutch still-lifes from being isolated in sterile public galleries. Even religious art, plundered from churches, retains a faint tincture of its original potency in museums, which, in their secular ways, are nothing if not churchy. What museums aren't is attuned to regular people's private lives. Most Dutch and Flemish still-lifes were made to hang on crowded walls in cozy rooms in foggy seaports, busy with trade. Sharing light from oil lamps and candles with some of the very types of objects that they rendered, the pictures were possessions about possessions. Their rhetoric and poetry depended on physical and metaphysical jostling with nearby real things. Museums banish real things and substitute the curatorial wall label.

Although the Cleveland show is wall-labelled to the gills, it won me over by the sheer, immersive quantity of extremely various, variously perfect paintings. Among many sorts of tabletop subjects, there are "breakfast" pictures and "tobacco" pictures. (One of the latter, by Hubert van Ravesteyn, includes a brand-name tobacco pack—perhaps a very early example of Hollywood-style product placement.) There are surreal florals that defy nature by incorporating flowers that bloom in different seasons; fool-the-eye letter-board arrays of paper items; and, for vicarious touches of class, scenes of slain game animals. And then there are the vanitas paintings. Human skulls and just snuffed lamps and candles put a moralizing spin on accumulations of posh goods. Connoisseurs who like digging for coded messages dote on the vanitas, but I suspect that looming mortality was for these painters what lost love is for the Nashville songwriters—a standard hook.

"When you've seen one, you've seen them all, right?" a friend of mine remarked in the course of my informal survey. I have a better question: When you think you've seen only one Dutch still-life, have you really seen very much?

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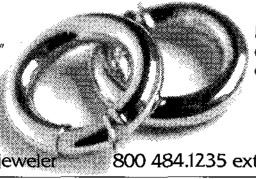

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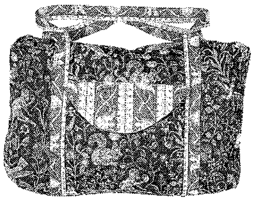

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In Cleveland, the genre emerges as a vast lexicon, almost a language, in which each example says something that may be less than profound but is always specific. The general content is more lyrical than allegorical, working in modes of rapture rather than extractable meanings. When I first entered the show, the paintings were mute to me. On my third go-around, everything was up and talking at once, holding a multitudinous conversation with and about *stuff.* None of the works' exclaiming, seducing, or brooding tones were addressed to me, of course, but, rather, to the constituency of a stuff-intoxicated time and place. The museum rooms are filled with ghosts.

THOSE invisible viewers, the exhilarated and anxious burghers of the Netherlands' golden age, are right on time to haunt us, here in our own epoch of nerve-racking affluence. The Dutch are sometimes credited with inventing capitalism. Lately, it seems as if capitalism had invented us. The longer I looked in Cleveland, the more familiar seemed the driven production of these paintings and their themes of insatiate consumption. Then, as now, the works functioned in the world as handmade units of money, accepted in payment of debts. The profusion of still-life painting, which was deemed the least valuable of pictorial genres, may bespeak the Dutch art economy's need for loose change. You will have trouble maintaining a robust popular trade if your smallest currency is hundred-dollar bills.

Quality counted. Some painters got rich from their still-lifes—almost always the right ones, as far as I can tell. (Dutch taste was equal to Dutch talent.) But market motives ruled. For the spectacularly accomplished Willem Kalf—whose "Drinking Horn with a Lobster on a Table" (c. 1653) has a succulent lobster redness that is cut, in the eye and on the mind's tongue, with a peeled lemon's pale, acidic yellow—it made sense to quit painting in 1680, in favor of art dealing. For the masses of people who owned still-lifes, the pictures had added appeal as fantasy extensions of wealth. Consider: the objects depicted in the pictures were often more costly than the pictures themselves. Does this fact shock you? It did me, indicating that these master artists were, in the social scheme of things, lit-

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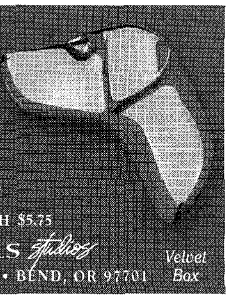

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tle more than humble artisans. They got their subjects right because that was the job description—never mind that they painted like angels in the doing of it.

The mystery of the work in this show is no mystery but, rather, a guild secret, notably in the painters' godlike creations of light. In the Netherlands, seventeenth-century painting of light was an application of collective genius, handed down from masters to apprentices until, quite abruptly, it perished. Anyone who will work hard at it can limn objects in apparent relief with the old techniques of chiaroscuro and highlight, and anyone moderately gifted can make a painted surface appear to glow from within. But nobody, for three centuries, has so matter-of-factly done both at once. The effect is tactile as well as visual, and sometimes olfactory, too, as in an astonishing painting from the sixteen-fifties by Abraham van Beyeren, the "fish painter." Flounders, partly disembowelled haddock, crabs, mussels, and a slice of salmon are heaped in what looks to be a market stall and raked by light that releases a softly gleaming, pungent, disconcerting glory—an ur-fishiness. The finesse of the details draws us in as the beauty of the whole advances toward us. Only an extraordinary concentration on life and art, simultaneously, could achieve such sorcery.

Leave it to Rembrandt to tell the most perceptive story about the strange, intimate magic of Dutch still-life. His only known still-life painting, "Dead Peafowl" (c. 1639), is a large canvas of two huge, freshly killed female birds. One is strung by its legs—with its wings flung open—from the inside shutter of a glassless window in a massive stone wall. The other lies on a ledge below, exuding a flow of rich blood. A moonfaced little girl leans in at the window, with dark night behind her. Her velvet dress, archaic in style, hints at a tableau of time past. She smiles with satisfaction at what she sees—which is not what we see. The old Rembrandtian trapdoor of delayed revelation springs when we realize that our view of the birds is the back side of what she beholds—which, to judge from her attitude, is dinner. What is a still-life to us is real life to her. She and the gaudy peafowl and the great house and the night belong together, in a world that, like the old, lucky Netherlands, will always charm while continuing to exclude us. ♦

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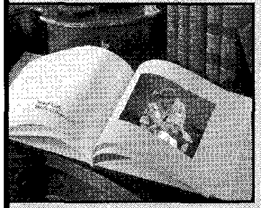

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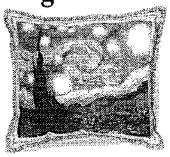

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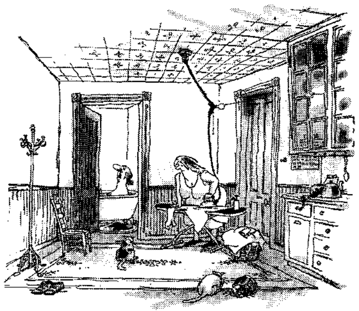

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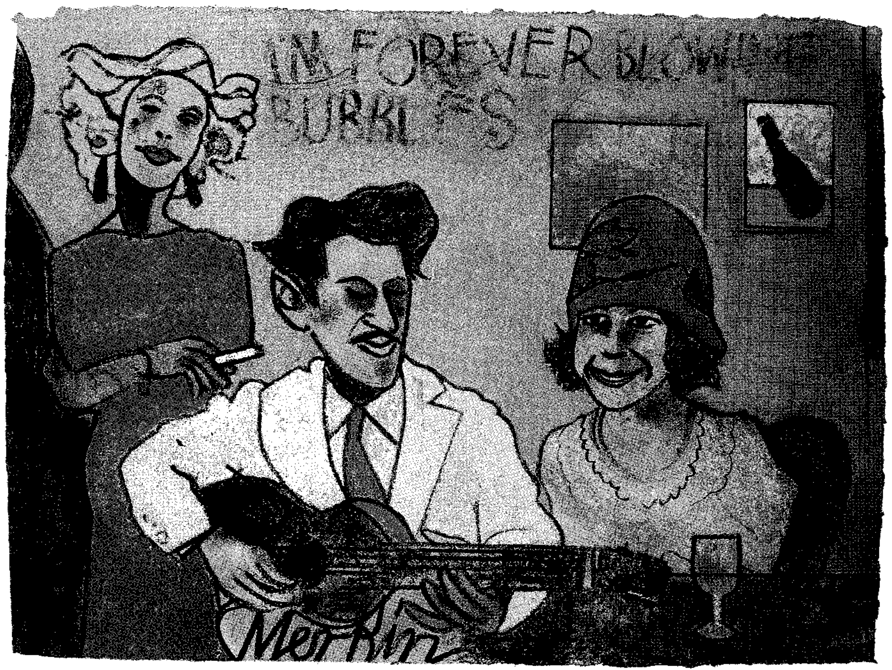
The anecdotal music of "Sweet and Lowdown," and "The End of the Affair."

BY DAVID DENBY

PLAYING himself, or some variation on himself (he could hardly play anything else), Woody Allen has appeared in many of his own movies, and he's usually given them a terrific shot of energy. But when he has cast other male actors in leading roles, he has cut the men down to size. John Cusack in "Bullets Over Broadway" and Kenneth Branagh in "Celebrity" imitated Woody's voice and manner, an uneasy sight that left some of us wondering such things as: Did they do it on command, or because they wanted to please the boss? Jeff Daniels, admittedly not a very imposing actor to begin with, seemed a mere featherweight in "The Purple Rose of Cairo." There's an ugly side to this, a whiff of nerdish revenge, as if Woody Allen wanted no man in his movies to exhibit dimensions greater than his own. Allen's new movie, "Sweet and Lowdown," his thirtieth, is his best picture in a decade or more, and a large part of the reason for its stature is that Allen has, for the first time, cast a tremendous actor in the leading role—Sean Penn, in a cream suit and an awful mustache, as Emmet Ray, jazz great of the thirties. Emmet, who is entirely imaginary but redolent of many real-life "lost" figures of the period, is a guitar player of genius who is also a worm and a loser. The movie is full of Allen's best qualities—his love of fable and anecdote, his reverence, his scorn, his off-center classicism, in which rigor and spontaneity combine with a sure lightness of touch. But Penn is the focus: he creates a character that is not some new aspect of Woody but new from the ground up. He does for Woody Allen what De Niro did for Scorsese in "Raging Bull": he makes human inadequacy mesmerizing.

At the beginning of the movie, we see Woody himself, talking to us about Emmet, and he's followed by a variety of other jazz experts, some real, some cronies of Allen's, who hold forth on the notoriously self-destructive guitar player. The make-believe "memoir" sets the movie within the nostalgic world of



Dazzling riffs: As the jazz great Emmet Ray, Sean Penn, with Uma Thurman and Samantha Morton, is a surprising new kind of Woody Allen leading man.

jazz rumination, the endless loving chatter familiar from books and documentaries about life on the road: the booze, the gangsters, the art created on the run—the beautifully tawdry faded jazz life, forever heartbreaking. Is there a jazz lover of sixty years or older who did not intensely admire as a youth some local hero in Boston or Tulsa or Oakland? A great tenor-sax player, say, who never made it to New York, never made many records, and then just faded away? As a type, that player is Emmet: When we first see him, he's shooting pool and collecting money from the whores that he "manages." He's too drunk half the time to show up for his club dates, but when he finally sits onstage with his little group, playing "Limehouse Blues" or "Sweet Georgia Brown"—either in honeyed or dazzlingly fast multilayered riffs—he's sheer magic. (The contemporary guitarists Howard Alden and Bucky Pizzarelli do the playing.)

As Penn plays the guitar, his face registers little shifts of tension and release that suggest the effort Emmet puts into his work. As an artist, he has a complex consciousness. But when he stops playing, Emmet immediately becomes a boor—a cheap, boastful petty criminal. That a great artist can also be a louse is a good joke on the conventional understanding of what artists are like, and since Emmet does have a soul—hidden, for the most part, and twisted when visible—the split between grace and viciousness within him goes beyond a joke. Emmet tries very, very hard to be cool. With his matching suits and hat and his dangling cigarette, he thinks he's the epitome of thirties style. But he has the style of a man in a cigarette ad, and he's so boastful that he has to inform even the bums in a railroad yard that he's a great guitarist—always adding, however, that Django Reinhardt, the European, the Gypsy, is greater still. (Some of Reinhardt's playing is heard on the soundtrack.)

It's a running gag in the movie that the two times Emmet came face to face with Django, in Europe, he fainted dead away. Emmet has his obscure, indecipherable obsessions. He likes to shoot rats in a dump (he takes his girls there and hands them a revolver); and he enjoys watching trains go by. The unhappiness of his childhood (we hear of it

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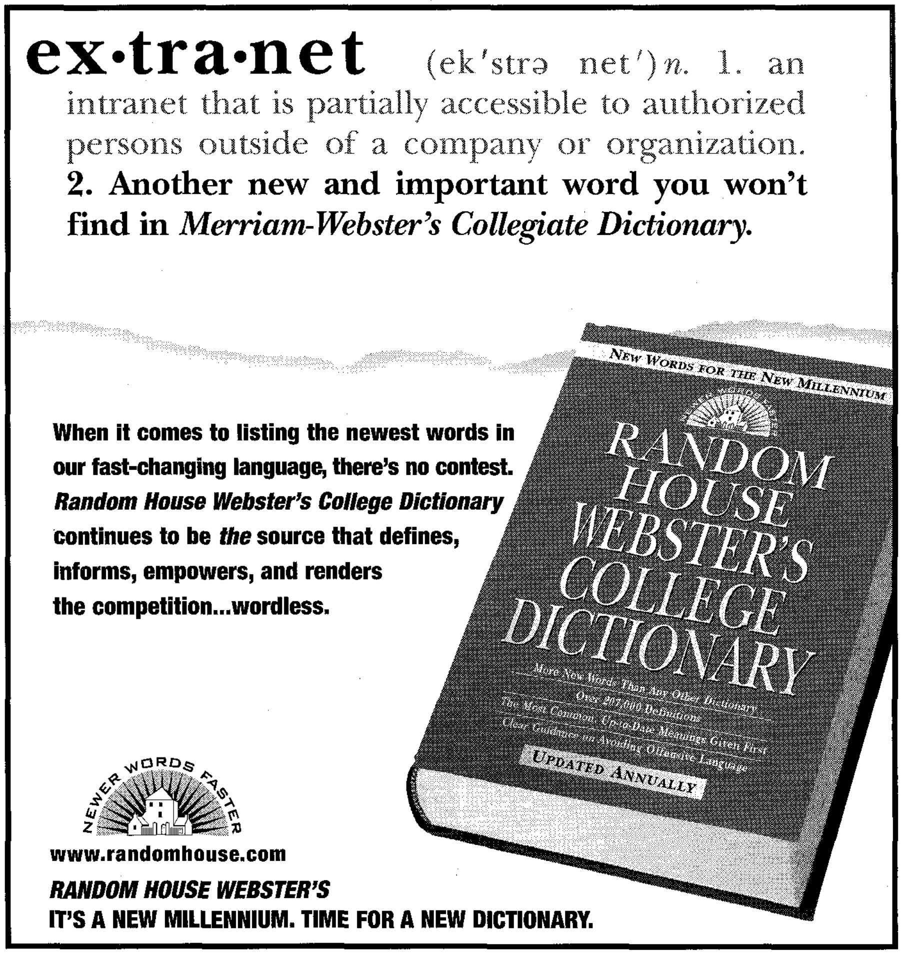
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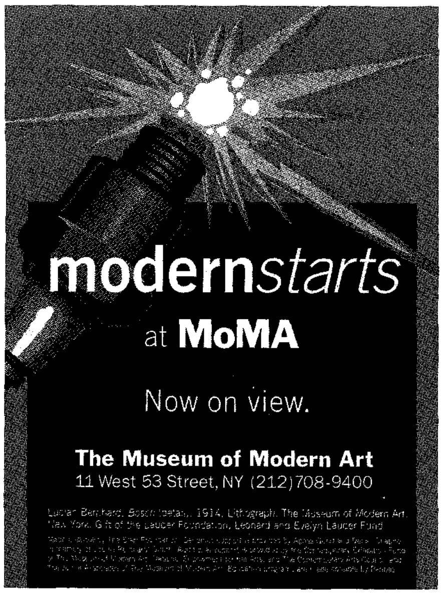

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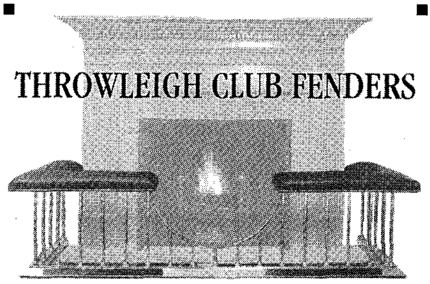

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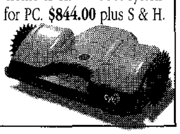

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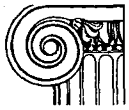

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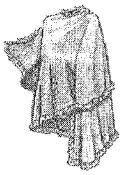
fleetingly) is buried so deep within him that he can exist only by killing the rodent in himself over and over. Penn scrunches up his small, shrewd face; he has a hitch in his voice—he talks in a spurting little rasp—and a hitch in his walk, which is swaggering but uncertain. He's the opposite of Zelig, so singular that no one can forget him. His Emmet doesn't understand himself at all, and this is played for laughs, but Allen creates a powerful sympathy as well. We care about Emmet because he's so pathetically bewildered. Incomprehension is his soulfulness.

By luck, Emmet finds the right girl—Hattie, who is mute from a childhood illness. Actually, she's the only girl for him, the only one who won't interrupt his self-serving monologues. The English actress Samantha Morton, hatted and crumpet-faced, her body hidden in a shapeless dress, appears both crushed and ravenous. She generally keeps her eyes down, only to look at Penn with a devastating flash of longing or resentment now and then. Because she's mute, and a victim, she seems, inevitably, a descendant of Mae Marsh or Lillian Gish or any of the beautiful, suffering heroines of silent film. Allen obviously wanted us to make that association, but he doesn't overdo the pathos. Hattie remains a needy, distant woman, just odd enough to be a genuine poetic creation.

"Sweet and Lowdown" is made up of short vignettes held together by narration. The loose-limbed form makes it easier for Allen to spring his wildest tales about Emmet. And yet the scenes, however funny, are all held in the grip of that rich jazz-world sentiment, with its stylized glamour of thirties clothes and cars and clubs, all lovingly photographed in golden tones by the Chinese cinematographer Zhao Fei. The film is about memory colored by emotion. Allen has tried for comparable moods before, but he's never had a protagonist as riveting as Emmet or a fable as good as this one. When the movie ends, we realize we've seen Woody Allen's version of "La Strada"—the Fellini masterpiece about a carnival strongman (Anthony Quinn) who thinks he needs no one and the waif who loves him (Giulietta Masina). Fellini's movie has its universal-humanist message, but Woody's tones are different—more



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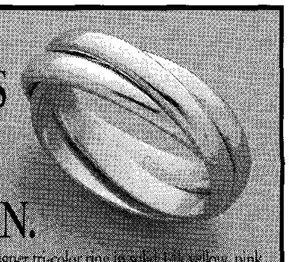

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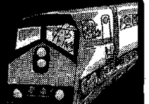

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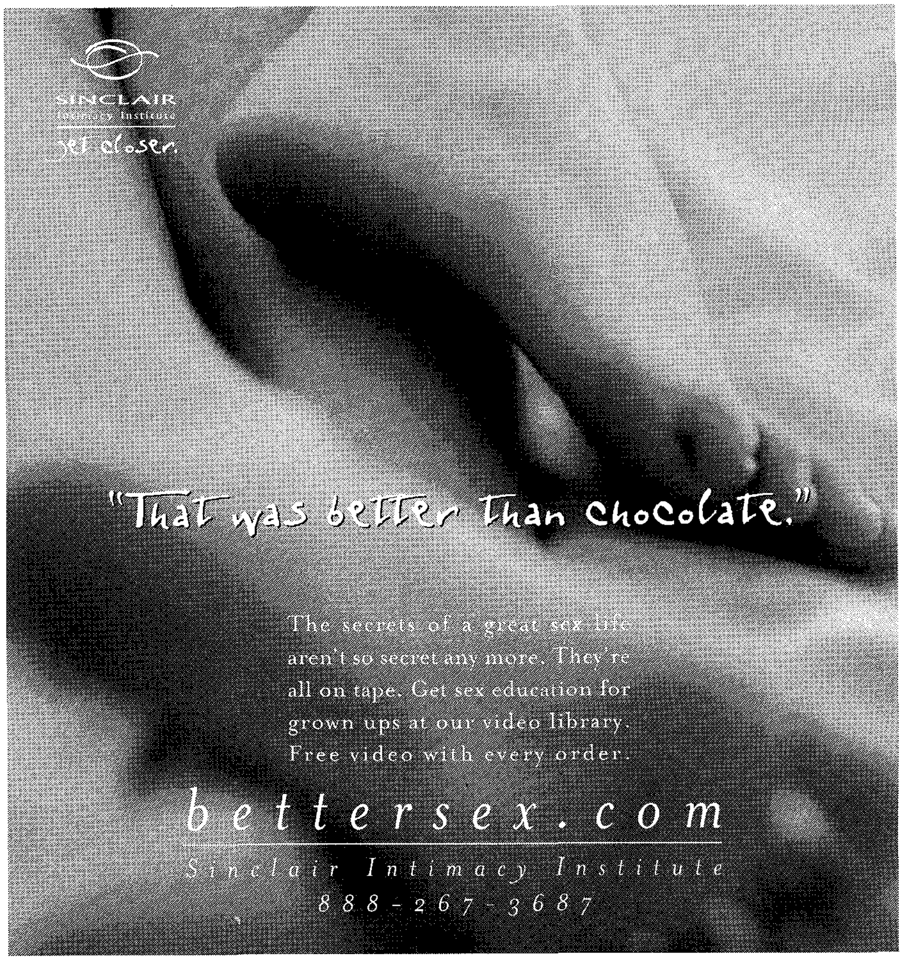
idiosyncratic, less official, less reassuring. “Sweet and Lowdown” is mocking but casually sad, casually moving. It’s a true jazz movie, and one of Allen’s finest achievements.

LONDON during the blitz; furtive, deep-in-the-shadows wartime romance; thwarted desire and suppressed rage and guilt: “The End of the Affair” is suitably intense and sombre. The director, Neil Jordan, who adapted Graham Greene’s celebrated 1951 novel, put enough gloom and rain in the picture to blight an entire movie season. The air is gray with mist and soot, as if the ash of assaulted London had seeped into everyone’s soul. Yet the picture has an arrowlike swiftness, and a good part of Greene’s intelligence and candor comes through. I wish that I could have enjoyed it more—enjoyed it, that is, as much as I admired it. But Greene’s story by its very nature cannot explode into dramatic life on the screen. Too much is held in, hidden, turned into a puzzle. This is, after all, a very strange romantic triangle. The principal players are the writer Maurice Bendrix (Ralph Fiennes), a stand-in for Greene himself; a married woman, Sarah (Julianne Moore); and God. To be sure, there is another man, Sarah’s husband, Henry (Stephen Rea), but he’s an emotional neuter, decent but passive, whom Rea plays with an abashed silence. God, not Henry, is the apex of the triangle. Bendrix addresses Him, with elaborate loathing, and Sarah needs Him. But God, for all his importance, is getting harder and harder to cast these days.

I am not being facetious about Greene’s Catholicism: the issues are very real for him. The story begins in 1946. Two years earlier, the lovers were almost killed by a falling bomb. When they survive, Sarah abruptly breaks off the affair. Now Bendrix suspects her of carrying on with someone else; he makes a pact of sympathy with her miserable husband and hires a wonderfully precise Dickensian detective (Ian Hart), who spies on everyone. There are flashbacks to scenes of harried wartime lovemaking and, in general, much narrative complication that produces a hero who tells us the story as he’s acting in it, almost as if he were creating the events himself as a fiction. Fiennes makes Bendrix a man whose hatred defines his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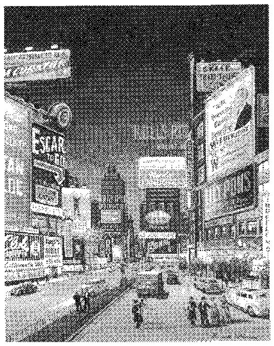
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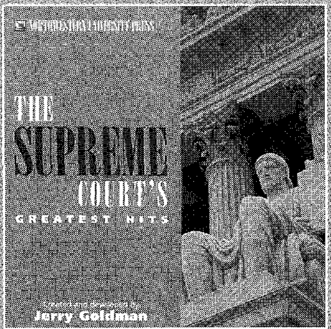
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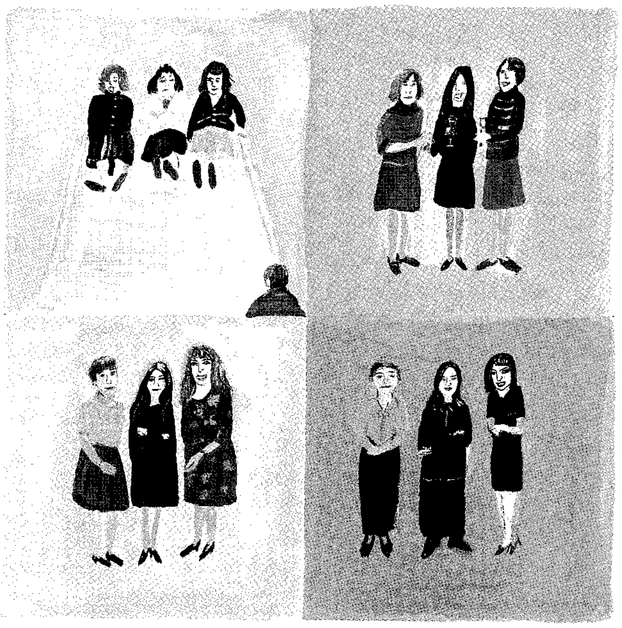
intelligence. But Sarah is not vivid in the same way. Proper and unhappy, Julianne Moore is elegant in her gray suits and mink stoles, and lovely in her nakedness. But when Sarah goes from adulteress to high-society holy woman, healing through her touch, the change is too much of a stretch for many of us, Catholic or not. The transformation might have worked better if we had understood more of what faith means to Sarah. But "The End of the Affair" keeps her nature concealed; Sarah remains a conundrum, and, in this intelligent but muffled movie, we lose her even more thoroughly than her lover does. ♦

LIFE GOES ON

The mystery of personality, and the changing lives of the "7 Up" kids.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

THE faces and the stories of the British children in Michael Apted's ongoing series of documentary films, which began with "7 Up," in 1964, and has been updated every seven years since then, are so familiar to anyone who has seen one or two of the films that we don't feel like voyeurs when we watch them; by now, these people are like old acquaintances we can't wait to see again, to find out what has happened to them. Old acquaintances, but exotic ones—the lives we see, especially in the earlier films, bear little resemblance to anything we would describe as the American experience. From an early age, the children in these films—there were fourteen in "7 Up"; several of them decided, at various stages of the project, not to continue with it, and "42 Up," the latest installment, features eleven forty-two-year-olds—were subject to decisions whose very purpose was to determine, and possibly seal, their fate. In a society with a class system like England's, everyone has a place, but you don't get to choose your place. For an American, it is truly strange to see that whether a child goes to, say, a grammar school or a comprehensive school can have such a crucial effect on the child's future (especially when you haven't been told what the difference is between the two kinds of school). The England of the "Up" films is a bit of a mystery, which makes the series only more fascinating to us.



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"7 Up," however, was not made in order to fascinate, exactly. Like all the subsequent films, it was produced by Granada Television, and was part of a weekly documentary series called "World in Action." It was intended as a political piece, an exploration of the class system, which is to say that it was meant to be an indictment. It was also meant to be a one-time thing, but it proved to be such a charmed work, so winning, and so gripping, that it begged to be kept going. The idea has now gone global: "Up"s have been made in Russia, America, South Africa, Germany, and Japan, and Apted has had a hand in a couple of them. (Apted didn't actually direct

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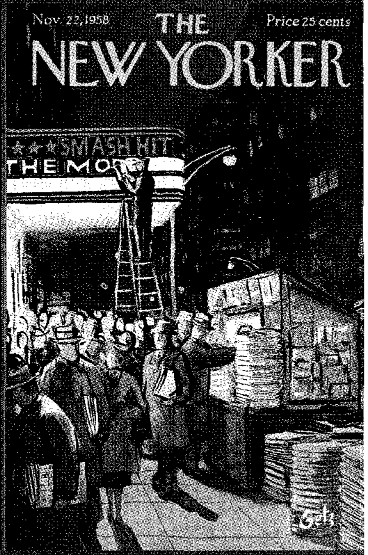

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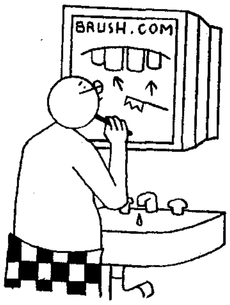
"7 Up"; he was the project's researcher, and it was his job to choose the children. By the time the next installment—called "Seven Plus Seven"—loomed, the director of "7 Up" had left Granada and Apted had become a director himself, so he took on the task.)

"Give me a child until he is seven, and I will give you the man," a voice intones in the first film, and the clip has been inserted in every subsequent film. The quote announces the film's intention to examine the extent to which social and economic background determines a child's future opportunities and choices, and it purports to give the viewer "a glimpse of England in the year 2000—the shop steward and the executive of the year 2000 are now seven years old." As a hypothesis, the epigraph—a Jesuit credo—isn't a very good one; we're not given these children until they are seven, we're given them *at* seven, and who's to say if what comes out of their mouths speaks to their backgrounds or only to whether they had a hot or a cold lunch that day. Until "35 Up," the only parent seen onscreen is the mother of one of the boys, Symon, who is black; a shot of the mother, who is white, walking along the street serves to inform us that Symon is of mixed-race parentage. But the epigraph is not all wrong, either: some of the lives we see, as the years go by, have a trajectory that we might have predicted. (Still, an accurate prediction is really only a lucky guess.) In any event, none of the children grew up to be a shop steward or an executive.



What started out as a politically motivated snapshot has now become a saga of great, if quiet, drama—the drama of the human voyage through life. Apted chose several children from the upper class, several from the working class, two middle-class children, a farmer's son, and two boys from a children's home. Only four of the original fourteen were girls—Jackie, Lynn, and Sue, from London's East End, and Suzy, an upper-class girl whose father owned a four-thousand-acre estate in Scotland. By the time "28 Up" came out (it was the first feature-length "Up," and the first one to be shown theatrically in this country), there were three previous films to draw on, and Apted had an opportunity to create telling juxtapositions; the focus became not what the subjects said and how they compared with one another but how what each person said resonated with things he or she had said earlier. In "28 Up," Suzy is seen in a shot from "21 Up" telling Apted that she's cynical about marriage, and that she doesn't like babies. Then Apted cuts to a shot of Suzy at twenty-eight: she's been married for six years, and is playing outside with her two children, looking worlds happier than her defensive, spoiled-sounding twenty-one-year-old self. (A few years ago, we learn in "42 Up," Suzy trained to become a bereavement counsellor.) Likewise, Jackie told Apted in "28 Up" that she was too selfish to have children. He shows this footage again in "35 Up," and the next shot is a closeup of Jackie's toddler son, with Jackie saying he's the best thing that could have happened to her. In the new film we find out that she has had two more babies. When asked what she finds most fun about having kids, she says, "The sheer unexpected pleasure of 'em."

Nice surprises like this have come with greater frequency as the children have grown up, but the first truly astonishing surprise is in "42 Up." It concerns Neil, who at seven was an adorable, bright-eyed boy living in a middle-class suburb of Liverpool. He wanted to be an astronaut or, failing that, a tour-bus driver: "I'm going to take people to the country and sometimes take them to the seaside, and I'll have a big loudspeaker." By "Seven Plus Seven," Neil's eyes had gone utterly dead, and he looked fearful. Down the years, his inner darkness seemed only to deepen. He dropped out of Aberdeen University after one term, and since then he has never had a steady job or a place to live. He has been subsisting on Social Security virtually all his adult life, and has drifted from place to place, tossing up on the rainy, bleak (magnificently bleak, but, still, bleak) west coast of Scotland in "28 Up" and living in the faraway Shetland Islands in "35 Up." Apted said to him in "21 Up," when he was living in a squat in London, that he was kicking against stability, and Neil replied, "I don't think I ever had any stability. I don't think I've been kicking against anything—I

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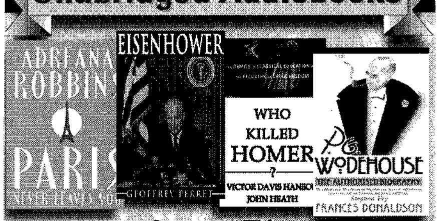

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think I've been kicking in midair the whole of my life." In "28 Up," there was an unforgettable shot of Neil sitting by the window of the trailer he was living in; he was looking away from the camera, lost in his own world, and lost to the world. By thirty-five, he seemed a shell of a person—unbearably sad, and possibly a little dangerous, with his close-shaved head that was missing a few patches of hair, his raggedy clothes, and his closed-off demeanor. When Apted asked him if he thought he was going mad, he said, "I don't think it—I know it."

Several people who saw "28 Up" and "35 Up" have told me recently that they thought Neil might be dead by now. Well, Neil is very much not dead. He never attempted to get any treatment for his mental and emotional problems, but he always seemed to have a stubbornness and persistence that got him through somehow. When, at twenty-one, he told Apted that he might like to go into politics, you felt sorry for him—clearly, that delusion had no chance of becoming a reality. And in "35 Up" his own prediction for himself was that in seven years he'd be wandering homeless around the streets of London. That didn't happen, but Neil did move to London, and a few years ago he was elected to the local council and has since been reëlected. (It's an unpaid job, so he's still on the dole.) He also got a B.A. at the Open University, and learned to teach English as a second language. All of this can only be called a miracle, and it fills your heart to the bursting point. And then your heart does burst, when, later in the film, we see a shot of Neil speaking at the wedding of another "Up" participant—Bruce, the soft-spoken, sensitive math teacher from a privileged background (if you can call being sent to boarding school at the age of five privileged). Bruce got married at forty, and Apted, knowing how moving this event would be to viewers, and no doubt moved by it himself, for the first time violated his policy of not filming his subjects except at seven-year intervals, and sent a camera crew to the event. Apted had asked the thirty-five-year-old Bruce about marriage: "You're getting on a bit—are you getting worried?" Bruce, reflecting on how his low-key temperament might have kept him from seizing certain romantic opportunities, said, "That's the trouble with re-

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serve. You're not rejected, but you never know what might have been." The very next shot in "42 Up" is of Bruce in the church, tying his tie and putting on his coat, minutes away from marrying Penny, who teaches at the same East End school as he does. It doesn't do, perhaps, to be overexcited about someone's wedding—we all know what can, and does, happen to a lot of marriages—but I'll go out on a limb and predict, or at least wish for, a long, happy marriage for Bruce and Penny. When we see them doing ordinary things—cooking dinner together, or riding bikes—they seem to truly appreciate their good fortune in finding each other. And they have a sense of humor about it. When Apted asked Bruce what he found to be the most shocking thing about marriage, he said, "Three bags of clothes getting chucked out" by Penny. Penny, talking about how Bruce proposed, said that they were having a conversation about something else when he brought it up, "and if I hadn't been listening carefully I would have missed it completely."

What's extraordinary about Bruce's story is that in addition to finding personal happiness he has made an important and very real difference in Neil's life. At a dinner after the filming of "28 Up," Bruce and Neil began a friendship, and when Neil moved to London he stayed with Bruce for two months. (Suffice it to say that most people would find it difficult to have Neil stay with them for two days.) Perhaps everyone should stay with Bruce for two months—he has the gift of being able to live according to his principles, which are not rigid but are very clear. At seven, he said that he wanted to be a missionary; at fourteen he had dropped the idea, because he felt he wasn't a good communicator. But he has always kept his Christian faith, and he said in an earlier film that he believes that "a good act is never wasted." (Bruce is also a socialist, and in "28 Up" and "35 Up" he had some choice words for Margaret Thatcher and her shredding of the social contract.) Whatever the final legacy of the "Up" films, perhaps the most wondrous thing they will have accomplished is to have enabled two people who otherwise would never have met to become good friends, and at a time when one of them desperately needed a friend.

Apted has said that it gets harder each time to persuade the "Up" children, now the "Up" adults, to participate in the films. Their privacy is invaded, and some of them don't like being recognized on the street. (Because the "Up" films are shown on TV in Britain, the participants have become, more or less, public figures.) And, for the sake of the narrative, Apted has to include bits of earlier films which don't show people at their best, or show them at a time in their lives that they'd rather not relive over and over again. They're all wise by now to Apted's little tricks. Nick, the son of a Yorkshire farmer who has been teaching physics at the University of Wisconsin for some fifteen years, said at seven, in response to a question about girls, "I don't want to answer that. I don't answer those kind of questions." This was very cute, so naturally he was asked the same question in "Seven Plus Seven." Looking down at the ground (as all the fourteen-year-olds in the film have a habit of doing), he says, "I thought that one would come up," and refers to what he said at seven. "Is that the reason you're asking it?" Apted says yes. "I thought so." To his credit, Apted keeps such moments as this in the films—he's never visible onscreen, but in many instances he lets you know he's aware that his filming has had an effect on the participants. Every so often, his comments are disturbing and unnecessarily provocative. Disgruntled by the class system as he may be, Apted (who, for the record, went to Cambridge) occasionally appears to embody upper-class assumptions about achievement. When, in "35 Up," Tony, the East End cabbie who at seven wanted to be a jockey, says he has done everything he's wanted to do—he

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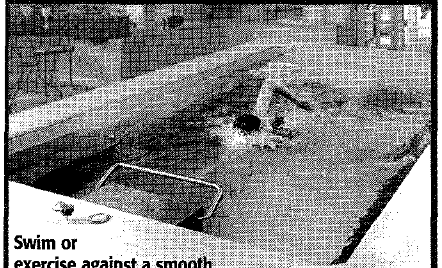

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once got to be in a race with the legendary Lester Piggott, he owned a pub for a short while, and he has occasionally worked as an extra in movies—Apted says, "But you didn't pull it off. You didn't pull the jockey off, you haven't made it as an actor, you didn't pull off the pub." Tony looks stricken and puzzled as he hears his successes redefined as failures. But he quickly regains his confidence and says, "Better to be a has-been than a never-was, isn't it?"

That's Tony for you—he has an answer for everything, and he answers on his own terms. That may be what makes him both the most charismatic and the most maddening person in the films. He's cheerful, resourceful, and congenitally pugnacious. He has a real way with words. In a scene from "21 Up," he's seen at a dog track, where he runs bets for patrons. He says that he's not interested in following politics, that it doesn't concern him. "All I understand is dogs' prices, girls, Knowledge"—the term for the training that London cabdrivers must undergo—"roads, streets, squares, and Mum and Dad and love. That's all I understand, and that's all I want to understand." He also has a way of glossing over his shortcomings—including unfaithfulness in marriage, and declining to lift a finger around the house—by saying things like "I'm not proud to say it or ashamed to say it, I'm just the way I am." Tony, more than anyone else, is an illustration of the persistence of personality. He *is* just the way he is. One of the great things about the "Up" films is that they don't pretend to understand why people are the way they are; the stability of personality is seen as no more explicable than the unravelling or shifting of personality. "42 Up" draws no conclusions about what may lie ahead for the subjects seven or fourteen years down the road. Though it has to be said that none of the participants have moved out of the class they were born into, it also has to be said that none of them seemed to want to, not even the working-class girls. (Their goal is to have enough, not more than enough. How very un-American of them.) We have come to care deeply about these people, so we of course wonder what's in store for them, just as we wonder what's in store for ourselves, and we can't help making our own predictions. On the basis of "42 Up," we have every reason to be optimistic. ♦

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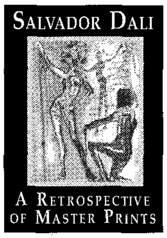

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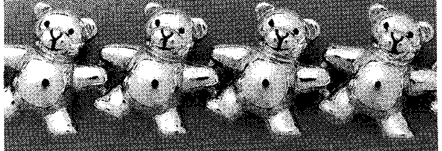

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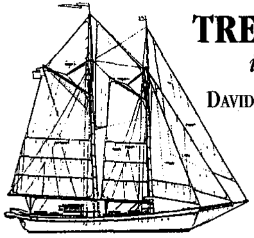

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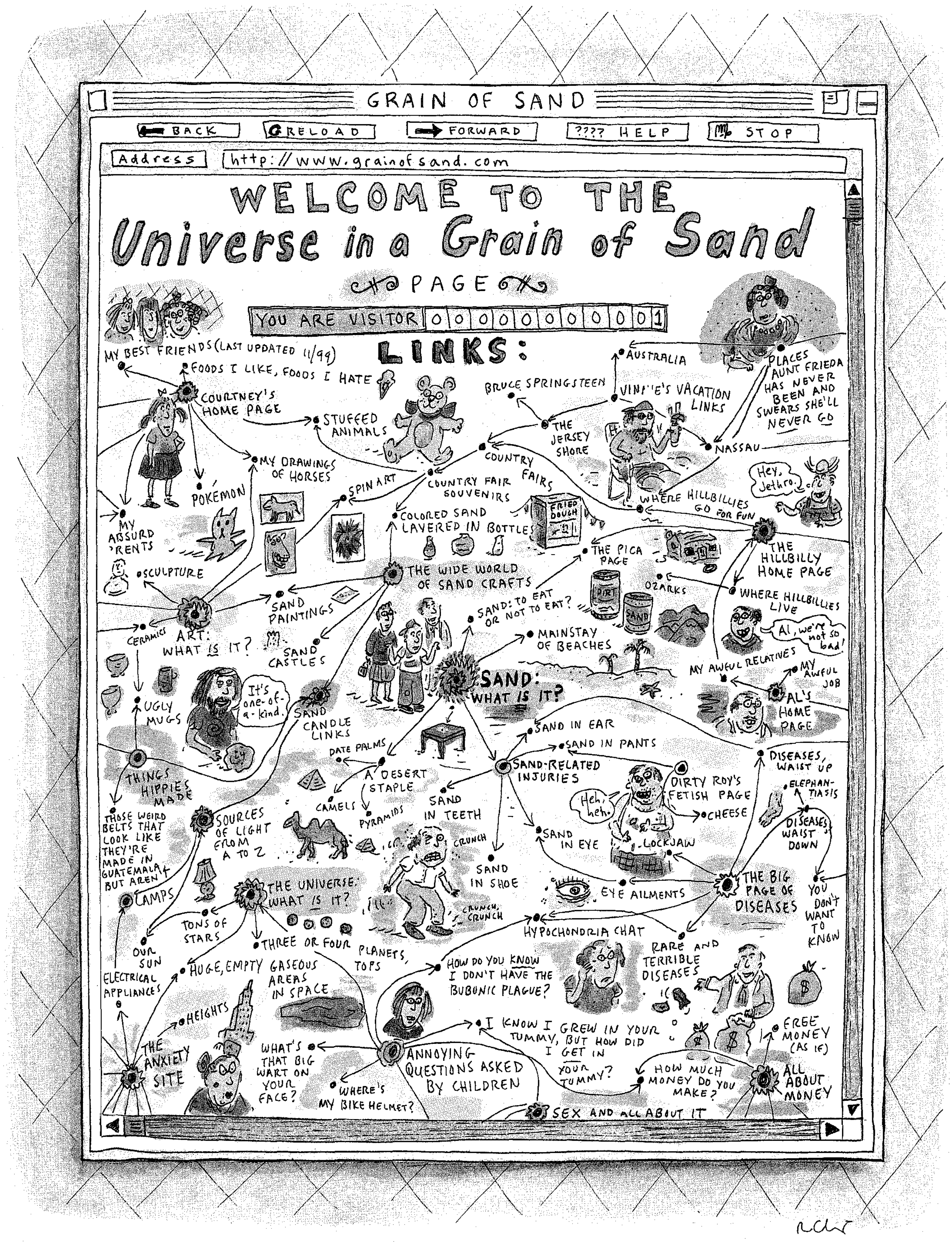
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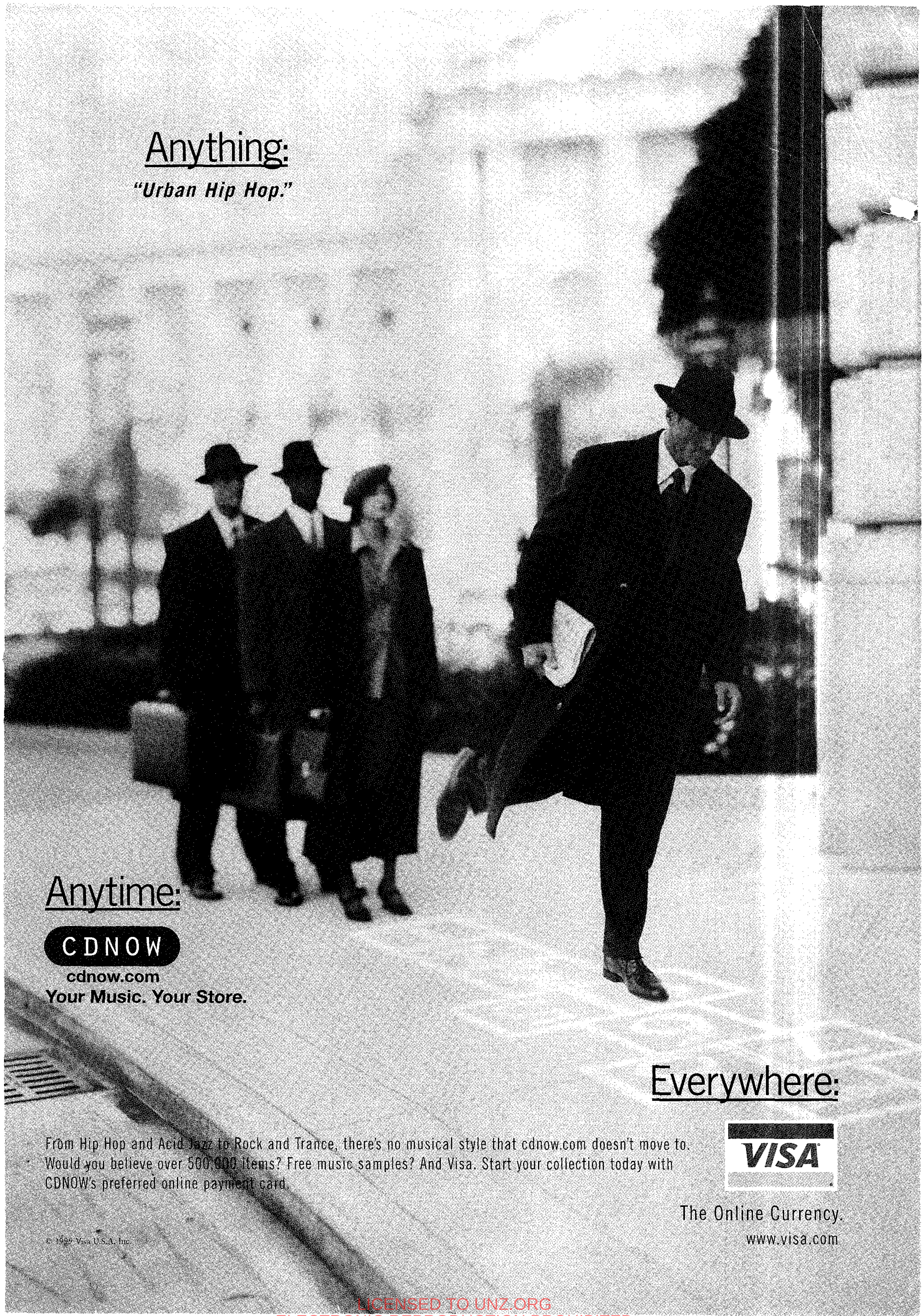
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